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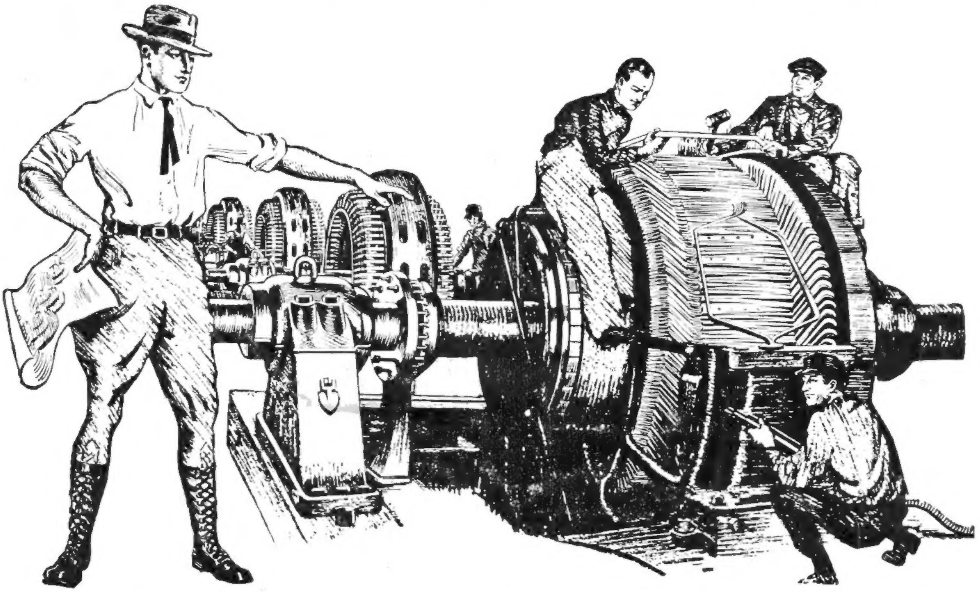

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ADVENTURE
May 18th, 1921

Published twice a month by The Ridgway Company at Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York City. Yearly subscription $4.00 in advance; single copy 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter Oct. 1, 1910, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

Volume 29
Number 4

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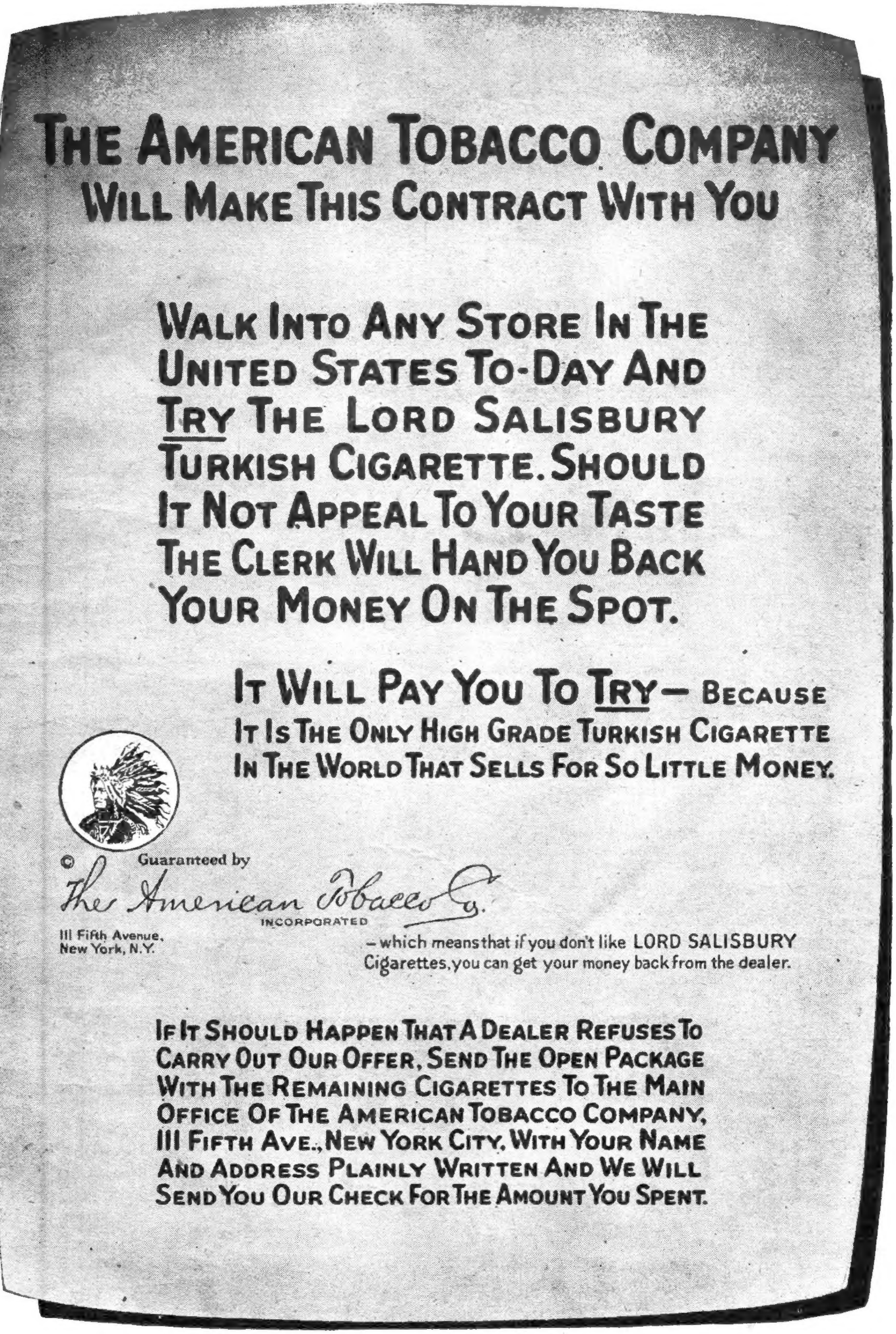

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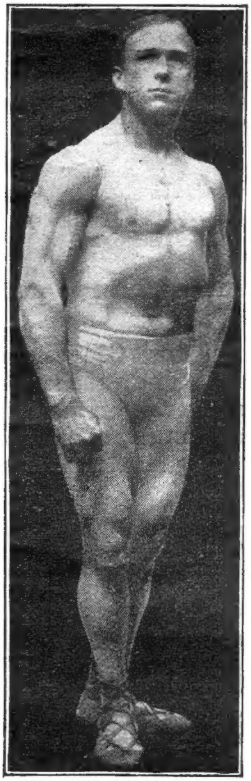

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Adventure

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Mid-May 1921
Vol·XXIX·No·4

Published Twice a Month by The Ridgway Company

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Headings . . . . Remington Schuyler

Cover Design . . . . Lon Megargee

IN THE village of skulls the forces of *Cha* the King and of *Quakka* the Witch-Doctor do battle to the death for mastery of a South Sea tribe. And the struggle is indecisive till the white man takes a hand. "THE MOON MASTER," by J. Allan Dunn, a novelette complete in the next issue.

DEEP in the Amazon jungle two Brazilian wanderers meet the loathsome, mysterious servant of the tribal House of Voices—a wonder-worker whose miracles astonish the Indians, the visitors and finally himself. His nickname in Portuguese is "THE *BARRIGUDO*"—which being interpreted means "Bag-Belly Monkey;" and it is this nickname which gives the title to Arthur O. Friel's novelette, complete in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Adventure
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a Pot of Gold

a complete Novelette by E. S. Pladwell

Author of "Santa Claus from Hades," "His Word of Honor," etc.

HE WAS nineteen years old, but his worldly face might have belonged to a man of forty. Slack-jawed, small-mouthed, with black hair matted over a low forehead and eyes set close together, he looked just what he was—a dangerous little pest with the courage of a mouse, the craft of a weasel and the malice of a tarantula.

He lay in the shade of a mesquite-bush above a dirty little water-hole that shimmered in a bowl of yellow sand. Two heavy pistols dangled from his hips. In his belt were cartridges innumerable. He lay still, as he had lain for two hours. He even forbore to smoke.

He had no particular plans in mind. He never had. He had merely stumbled across a camp at a water-hole.

Being involved in one of the country's usual feuds, he was waiting to see who owned the camp. The wrong party could be out of luck. An innocent person might live. The camp belongings were not worth much anyhow.

The sound of approaching men came to the young killer's quick ears. Mesquite-bushes on the other side of the spring parted. He swung the muzzle of his six-shooter forward stealthily, sighting through a clump of underbrush.

The figures of two good-sized men in blue overalls and sweaty checked shirts labored into view and looked relieved at sight of their little camp. The younger man was supporting the older. The latter, a sandy-bearded citizen of about forty-five whose face was wrinkled from years of facing sun and wind, favored his left foot while walking. His face registered dull pain.

"That'll be about the last time I'll ever git hi-larious about anything," he grunted as he made for his blankets among the littered papers and tin cans near the water-hole. "Here after fifteen years I've stumbled on the gosh-wallopin'est vein of gold-bearin' rock in all creation, and what happens? I bust my ankle!"

"It may not be that bad," said the other.

But the older man shook a lugubrious head.

"I shouldn't have felt so good," he insisted as he slumped down and gingerly took a top-boot from an enlarged foot.

"I might have known somethin' would happen. The minute I started dancin' around like a durned undignified idjut somethin' warned me to go slow; but I wouldn't listen. I had to cavort around and yell like a fool Injun till I slipped off'n that rock."

"Well, the mine was worth it," declared the other.

But the senior partner was determined to atone for his optimism.

"We lost a durned good burro," he reminded the other dolefully.

The other scooped a pan of water from the spring.

"That's all right. We named the claim

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for old Jessica, didn't we? It isn't every burro that names a million-dollar mine."

"We should have been more dignified," mumbled the older man.

The younger partner straightened and looked backward over the sagebrush and the white alkali plain in the distance. His face saddened a little.

It was a thoughtful, whimsical, intelligent face blessed with straightforward eyes, a square jaw and a high forehead. Just now it was frightfully streaked with grime and the hair stood up in a cockatoo effect.

"I guess we're justified," he remarked. "Look what we've gone through. Six months of it, and nothing to show until today."

"Huh! Look at me," grunted the other. "Fifteen years of it."

He looked it. In four words he had described himself. Homeless, lonely, unkempt, indomitable, untamable, unkillable, hoping always for the best and thoroughly inured to the worst, he belonged to the leather-faced, steel-bodied, iron-hearted tribe which sallies forth with a canteen and a plug of tobacco to conquer an El Dorado. He was a typical desert prospector.

Over the scanty hair of his forehead hung the wreck of a brown felt hat. His eyebrows were hairy, his eyes were slitted from facing the sun and his nose looked like a red bulb. His mouth and chin were hidden by a scraggly, sandy beard. Under the chin was a tattered red bandanna which sagged down over a frayed and sweaty shirt. His blue overalls, with the color faded from age, were so baggy that they descended inward in a majestic Zouave sweep to the tops of his battered tan boots, which in turn needed repairs badly.

ONE of the boots was off. The younger man cut away the sock, examined the swollen ankle thoroughly, laved it with water and made a rough bandage.

"There are no bones broken," he decided, "but you've probably wrenched every ligament in that foot. You'll have to go easy for some time."

The senior partner lay back.

"Oh, well; serves me right." He produced a reeking corncob and soon began blowing clouds of smoke.

"The question is, what are we goin' to do? Can you work that claim alone till I git well?"

"I can work all right if——"

"Yeh. If a lot of pesky road-agents and gunmen leave us alone. Consarn it, why did the Lord put that mine in amongst a passel of cutthroats? The minute they hear about it, then what?"

"I don't know."

Old Pete thumbed his pipe contemplatively.

"Seems like we've got to go keerful. If we git caught workin' that mine somethin's li'ble to happen to us."

The younger man's jaw squared.

"It's our claim!"

"Sure. Only don't git any fool notions about your rights. If you can't keep your rights in this country by force, son, you ain't got any."

The young man's steady blue eyes looked at his partner.

"All right. I'll take the chance. It's worth it."

"Um. Yes. Sure."

The old prospector's glance ranged over his partner's supple, broad-shouldered, lean-hipped body.

"I ain't sayin' you ain't got the sand, but you can't fight a whole county."

"There are some decent people here."

"Sure. Only most of 'em's moved away. Jed Hill and his rapscallions has things their own way. Don't make no mistake about that. Here in the civ'lized year of 1896 we're in the middle of the finest collection of or'nary rascals the——ever got together. It looks as if they're here to stay. You and me has found a mighty good claim at the wrong time."

"Well, what of it? Let's file on it and keep legal possession."

"Um. Yes. There's been about two dozen cases like that. Most of 'em died. The rest went a-runnin'."

The younger man seemed to study the shadowed mountains to the westward.

"In other words," he said slowly, "we have a mine and yet we haven't got it. We've chased a rainbow and found a hornet's nest where the pot of gold ought to be."

"That's about the size of it."

"What's the remedy?"

"There ain't none."

"And yet you danced like a two-year-old when the mine was found."

"Yep. Now I've got sober second thought."

"Oh, it's sober, all right. I knew there were some pretty tough citizens here, but I didn't think they were after prospectors."

"They ain't. Not till the prospector has somethin' worth takin' away. Then it's different."

The younger man knew he was receiving Gospel truth. Though no tenderfoot, his knowledge of local conditions was small compared to his partner's, who had been in the district for years and knew its personnel, politics, topography and water-holes through long experience.

The budding communities of southern California and western Arizona, finding too many discordant elements in their midst, had brandished shotguns and fence-rails effectively, sending these undesirables onward. It was one of those temporary waves of civic irritation. Card-sharps, tin-horn gamblers, gunmen, blackmailers and similar gentry streamed forth in a general exodus.

These wayward citizens drifted together in answer to some law of gravitation which attracts similar species, and traveled across hill and valley until they centered in this new country of gaunt mountains and waterless plains. Bickering, badgering, turbulent, loose and disorganized though they were, they soon became the dominant part of the population.

Leaders achieved followings. Birds of a feather flocked together. Gangs thrived and grew. Robberies and shootings were all the rage. The law's officials lost courage or hope of coping with the situation.

The country drifted into lawlessness, dragging reputable citizens into the maelstrom. The average man was forced to "stand in" with some gang for self-protection.

The result of the whole system was chaos. The natural climax followed.

Pickings grew slimmer as the gangs enlarged. Decent settlers moved onward. Small stores quit at a loss, leaving only vacant shacks to tell of past greatness. Miners ceased telling of their finds and were hard to catch. Stages quit handling anything of value.

The predatory gentry degenerated toward a policy of dog-eat-dog and robbed one another. Gang-feuds became the style.

It was not the place to discover a fine new gold-ledge, and old Pete realized it to the full. The younger man was more optimistic.

"We'll make it somehow," he declared. "We'll have to!"

"Yes, but we've got to be durned keerful. Every time you go to the claim keep a sharp eye out. If any one follers you lead him all over creation."

"Do you expect trouble right away?"

"Yep. I do. We're liable to git it from any direction. There's a special war goin' on around here. I learned about it yesterday. Forgot to tell you because I didn't want you to git excited about nothin'; but now we've got a mine on our hands."

"All right. Give me the worst."

"Jed Hill's gang's split. They had a big row. Some of his crowd thought they wasn't gittin' their share of the swag, so they sent Johnny Finley to speak up.

"Jed kicked the or'nary little devil clean through a window. The durned little rat-faced skunk called his crowd together and lit out to git Jed. They're still after each other.

"I dunno what's goin' to happen. That Finley kid's about the most treacherous, good-for-nothin' little murderer in the county. If you run up against him, look out. He ain't got no more regard for human life than a rattlesnake."

Up in the mesquite not fifteen yards away Johnny Finley was hesitating whether to pull trigger or wait for more information; but his tricky little brain told him to bide his time. He bided for a long while; but further information was not forthcoming, so the little bandit slowly and patiently wriggled out of the mesquite clump, made a noiseless crawl into a gully behind it and slipped over to a waiting horse half a mile away. He vanished westward like a ghost in the dusk.

AT DAWN next morning, while the younger partner cooked the frying-pan breakfast over a fire of dry brush, old Pete showed he had been studying during the night.

"Tom," he announced, "we've got to git that gold and keep the claim. There's only one way. You go ahead and pick up whatever good rock you can. I'll take the burro and go into town and git some liniment and a lot of grub and a new burro. We'll have to stock up if we stay here."

"You're not fit for a forty-mile trip."

"I'm not, hey? I can dangle one foot, can't I? Besides, what good can I do here?"

There was some logic in the plan and Tom realized it. He feared that the injury might be more dangerous than he thought. A ride like this over sun-blistered mountains and plains would kill an ordinary citizen; but for a tough old desert prospector it was just another hardship.

Tom considered.

"I wouldn't want you to have a touch of fever on the way."

Old Pete dived under his blankets and produced a bottle. Upon its label stared the wood-cut of a dignified bearded gentleman, and the wording proclaimed that this was Jones' Infallible Elixir of Life and Health, the Greatest Discovery of the Age.

"I don't fear no fever as long as old Jonesy's with me," retorted Pete. "I've packed this here e-lixir ten years and I've never had a sick day, come rain or shine. Old Jonesy'll cure anything."

He read from the label:

"Rheumatism, dyspepsia, diabetes, headaches, coughs, colds, chilblains, sciatica, lumbago, fevers, boils, rashes, fainting-spells, and all ailments of the throat, tonsils, lungs, kidney, liver, heart, back, and intestines. See—it says fever, too."

"It cures everything except bandits and rattlesnakes," agreed Tom, smiling.

He had heard the praises of Jones sung before.

Pete snorted. Without reply to the scoffer he came to his feet stiffly and started filling canteens. There were no further words. Tom took the hobbles off their one remaining burro and made some kind of seat out of its pack-saddle, helping his bulky partner aboard. The burro, laden with water, food and Pete, looked topheavy but undismayed.

"Keep your eye out," warned Pete, gathering the halter-rope. "If you see any one keep out of his way."

"I'll watch out. Take your time and heal that foot."

"Yeh. I will. So long. Hike along, Geraldine."

And the senior partner started on his forty-mile journey to the nearest settlement.

Tom watched the grotesque figure drop from sight behind a knoll. Then he buckled on a gun, picked up tools and some lunch, swung a canteen over his shoulder and struck out through the mesquite eastward toward the mine.

Striding along in the cool of the morning with the sun throwing long shadows from every sagebush and tingeing the near-by hills with copper and turquoise and gold and purple, he began to whistle happily while keeping a sharp eye for chance encounters. He felt like a knight who had found the Holy Grail.

The long months of fruitless prospecting were over. He had come upon something tangible. He and his partner were lucky. In a few months they had found what many other prospectors had sought for years and never found.

Even the heat of Summer was passing. It was coming October. The air seemed to have a cooler tang.

He crossed a dry plain and a drier lake without sign of vegetation. He entered a gully through a small range of cut-up hills. He climbed the shoulder of a brown granite mountain and descended upon a mesa which he traveled for half a mile.

His eyes appraised the irregular land below him where the cataclysms of all the ages had rippled the earth with bald yellow hills and purple gulches that ran in every direction toward a faraway range of bluish mountains.

The country was cruel, repellent, inhospitable; yet within this domain lay a thing which would satisfy all the desires of a man. It was as if a pearl lay in the throat of a tarantula.

Tom's eye picked the gateway to his El Dorado, the sixth gully to the northward. He swung down from the mesa and plodded into the cañon.

From above it looked small. Once within it, the sheer walls of a precipice arose on either side as if an earthquake had once cleft the hills and he were walking on the shadowed bottom of the crevasse.

For half a mile he plodded along the lonely, quiet cañon where his footfalls echoed loudly. Far above flew a buzzard. Otherwise the overpowering solitude of the place was unbroken. It had been that way for ages and eons.

He came to a turn where the cañon widened and a streak of sunlight tinged its upper walls. He reached another turn where the gorge became merely a small gulch between rounded brown-yellow hills.

At the foot of a central hill stood a monument of rocks carefully piled, and above this poor tribute to the late Jessica was a ledge that ran across the center of the hill and partly into the next one.

The ledge did not look like much. Just rock. But if a person examined a piece closely he would notice the glint of tiny yellowish particles. The claim was almost unbelievably rich.

Tom examined a location-notice on Jessica's monument and then went over certain other boundary-marks, assuring himself that the claim was ready to file on at any time. After that he busied himself collecting rock most of the day.

He started for camp at mid-afternoon. He traversed the quiet cañon and ascended the mesa, then went up to the shoulder of the mountain. A rattlesnake sang at him. He avoided the coiled terror and watched it writhe away.

"BEEN workin' your mine?" came a voice behind him.

Tom whirled and looked into cold, sneering eyes set close together in a young face prematurely old. In the youth's slim hand was a six-shooter with the muzzle pointed straight at Tom's chest. Tom slowly elevated his hands.

"I guess you may not file on that claim after all," came the young man's high-pitched voice. "Mebbe I need it more'n you do."

Tom was bewildered. He was off his guard, and the young desperado's knowledge stumped him.

"How—why—what makes you think I've got a claim?" he demanded.

The little rascal's slack mouth curled in a malicious smile.

"A birdie told me," he replied. "Told me a lot of things. Gimme that gun."

He reached forward and jerked Tom's six-shooter out of its holster, throwing the thing away. He had plenty of weapons. They stuck all over him.

Tom had regained some of his poise.

"What's this all about?" he demanded.

"All about? Huh! Quit joshin'."

The little killer quoted Pete's words sarcastically:

"If you see anybody follerin' you walk him all over creation. All but Johnny Finley. When Johnny's with you, better 'tend to business."

Tom knew what he was dealing with. This Finley youth was one of those half-humans born without mental capacity to realize a moral code. He was classed as a dangerous bad-man. In reality he was a defective with a receding jaw, and more of a menace than the worst bully in the country. No one could figure what he would do next.

Tom knew he had been overheard and tracked. If overheard, it must have been the night before, when Pete was talking about the mine.

It must have been by accident. Neither Tom nor Pete knew the man except by hearsay, and he had no reason to cross their trail except through coincidence. Therefore he must have been loafing near the water-hole when the conversation was held.

All these things flashed through Tom's mind in a second. He knew he was trapped, but he didn't know exactly the extent of the trap. Hours had passed since the night before. Finley perhaps had time to visit friends of his ilk who prowled around the country.

Had he told them of the mine or had he kept it to himself? Had word of Tom's big find passed among cutthroats and scoundrels already? If so, what chance had Tom and Pete to win out?

To the former the chances looked slim enough right now. The black muzzle of the six-shooter, held by a vicious hand, brooked no argument.

"Oh, I'll walk, all right!" grunted Tom.

The young criminal produced tobacco and paper with a quick motion while still holding the gun and rolled a cigaret with his unoccupied hand. His present temper was cocky and self-satisfied.

"Sure you will," he agreed. "I guess me and you understands each other. Now start."

Tom started, growling over his shoulder—

"I've heard of enterprise; but you take the cake."

"Meanin' what?"

"The other hold-up men don't rob a fellow till he has something to rob. You grab him almost before he gets it."

The young outlaw took it as a compliment.

"That's me," he agreed complacently. "I'm Johnny on the spot. Hafta be in this country."

"Yes; you've got a lot of competition."

"Not so much. Most of 'em's too tender-hearted. That's where they lose out. Now me, I ain't bothered that way a-tall."

Tom knew it was true. He also knew it was a careless prophecy. If Tom led him into the cañon and he saw that gold-ledge, then what? Would he merely drive Tom away from the place or would he eliminate a rival claimant and save future trouble? The answer was certain.

Tom saw what he was up against. Realization struck him like a sledge. Hot rebellion surged over him. It was not so much the mortal's fear of dying. It was revulsion against dying now.

Young, strong, with everything to live for and the gratification of all his desires within reach, he stood aghast at this injustice. He wanted to live. He had to live. There was a girl——

He clenched helpless fists, then unclenched them. That was not the way. Anger would arouse anger, and the other man had every advantage. There must be other ways.

Tom catalogued the little bandit's very apparent failings. He was vain, cold-blooded and reeking with cupidity.

Tom decided to begin on the man's vanity. He had no plan in mind. He only wanted an opening for an even chance. Any opening.

"How did you happen to be on top of the mountain?" he queried over his shoulder.

"I jest thought I'd look around."

"How did you know I'd come in this direction?"

"Fresh tracks at your water-hole. They led straight to the hill."

"I see. You're a good tracker."

The words came reluctantly. Tom hated to flatter a man he longed to smash, but he had to. Had to! Holding down his feelings, he laid it on thick.

"You've got enterprise, all right. I suppose you heard everything we said in camp last night."

"Every word."

"How is it you didn't stick us up then?"

"I wanted plenty of light and plenty of time. I wanted to ketch one of you alone. I ain't no darned fool."

"No. I guess you're brainier than most of 'em. The average man would have horned in right there."

Tom stopped and turned, holding his empty hands up.

"Say! Listen! You've got a little intelligence. Why don't you quit this gunman-holdup business and make better profits with less danger?"

* * *

IT WAS a tense moment. The little killer stood suspicious as a cat, and his pistol-arm fairly twitched with menace. But curiosity won. He licked his lips.

"Wadda you mean?"

"Why, I mean this: If you take the claim from me you can't conceal it, can you? Sooner or later you'll have the whole gang on your back. The minute you start showing gold-dust it's good-by. It'll be just fight, fight, fight till some one downs you."

Tom stopped. The other came closer and poked the muzzle of the pistol into his stomach. The little killer's eyes were glittering with suspicion, greed and curiosity.

"Go on," he snapped. "Say it quick. What's your idea?"

Tom racked his brain and evolved something, speaking slowly.

"My idea is this: You're in on the secret of the claim. You're the only one except Pete and myself. You can't do anything alone, but we can do a whole lot because nobody suspects us, so maybe we can figure out something and——"

Tom's right hand flashed downward. It was his one desperate chance. He gambled that the hand is quicker than the eye. He gambled that the other had lost a little alertness and that an arm stiffens into a set position from holding a pistol.

He won—by a hair.

The pistol blasted the left side of his shirt and stung his fingers. He yanked at the thing desperately. He twisted the muzzle upward and around.

The killer, quick as lightning, lashed his left hand backward for another pistol. Tom got around his right side and twisted his wrist upward. He got a finger inside the trigger guard. The trigger was squeezed in the mêlée. The gun was discharged again.

The little gunman's tense body grew limp. Strength left his hand. Tom pinioned his arms till the weapons dropped to the ground. Then the little bandit was allowed to slump down. The whole front of his shirt was red.

He sagged to a sitting position and glared at Tom with basilisk eyes. It was an anti-climax. Though perhaps mortally hurt he just sat there and stared with a malevolent glare that even pain could not efface.

Tom collected the weapons and unslung his canteen. The virulent stare made him irritable.

"Let me see that wound," he snapped, leaning forward and pulling the shirt apart.

"You—buncoed—me," charged the little gunman between gritted teeth.

"I had to."

The other grunted sardonically and relaxed, allowing Tom to lave the powder-burned wound in his chest. Though losing strength rapidly, the little bandit kept a baleful silence that was grimmer than threats.

Tom understood. He had duped a professional killer and shot him with his own gun. It was unforgivable. Tom saw the ugly portent for the future, yet he bound up the wound and gave the man every attention in his power.

Half an hour later a big prospector was toiling over the top of the mesa, holding a small, limp figure in his arms. A vulture wheeled far above in the blue, but soon lost interest and went onward.

An hour later the same two human figures came down the slope of a dun mountain and were lost in the foothills, where dusk enveloped them. Later the exhausted Tom staggered into camp and tossed the burden on his blankets.

Then began a long battle for a worthless life. It lasted all night with the ravings of fever turning the quiet camp into bedlam.

Dawn brought comparative quiet. Tom gathered all the weapons and staggered, blear-eyed, to a sheltered bunch of mesquite where he slept as if stunned.

Some time later mysterious footfalls awakened him. He peered through the brush to see a rough-looking man arrive with two burros laden with camp equipment and prospector's implements.

Later he awoke again. A similar outfit passed, led by a hairy red-shirted man.

Tom sat up and rubbed his eyes. He had never come across more than a few prospectors in a month. Now he saw two within an hour!

He looked westward across a low plain. A man and a burro were drawing near. Beyond them came another outfit and far away he could see two more.

"It's a rush," he gasped. "They've heard about our strike. Finley has talked."

If Finley talked, whom did he talk to? His own gang! Instantly Tom appraised these newcomers. They were not regular prospectors. They were too tough-looking.

Tom was in a trap. He was half a mile from his camp, but he could look down upon it. The new arrivals reached the water-hole and discovered Finley. Their voices were highly excitable.

Their coming was prearranged. The little killer had mobilized his clan and had gone ahead of them.

But why was he willing to listen to Tom's proposition on the mountaintop before Tom shot him? There was only one answer. The little scoundrel was willing to betray his followers if there was enough in it for him.

Tom now fully realized what sort of men he had to deal with. His present position was untenable. They had the water-hole.

Gathering up his weapons, slipping toward camp and sneaking out a half-filled canteen that lay in the brush behind Finley, he stole through the mesquite and started under the noonday sun toward civilization.

As he hiked along his lonesome path, canteen over shoulder, gun at hip and hat-brim pulled down against the rays of the sun, the rhythmic clomping of his high-topped surveyor's boots seemed to beat time to certain grim words running through his mind insistently. In reaching for his canteen in the mesquite he had overheard the little gunman screaming his half-delirious commands—

"Git that feller if you take a year!"

Tom had ached to make prompt retort; but there were six men at the camp. The odds were too great.

He kept on going.

II

THE town of Escalante comprised six saloons, two dance-halls, two stores, a warehouse, a blacksmith-shop, a post-office, seven residences, three wells, a tree, two cows, thirty-five burros, seven respectable citizens, a doctor, fourteen bartenders, twenty-six professional gamblers and about two hundred miners, stage-robbers, cattlemen, drunkards, sheep-herders, gun-fighters, ranchers and other itinerant citizens who made the money for the gamblers, bartenders and doctor to collect.

Pete arrived in town at eleven o'clock at night. His foot was swollen frightfully, while the burro had wilted. He first persuaded some one to drag the tottering burro to a corral and then sought a bed in a "hotel" over a dance-hall, where even pain failed to break his exhausted slumbers.

It never occurred to Pete to disturb the doctor at that hour. That sort of thing might be done by a tenderfoot; but Pete knew that the doctor was available only in case of mortal gunshot wounds. The doctor had plenty of night practise at that.

Next morning Pete presented himself before the bewhiskered medico. His foot was bathed in smelly drugs and bandaged, after which the doctor sold him a crutch, gave him some terse directions and shooed him into the world again.

Old Pete limped over to a wooden curb in front of a dance-hall where he took a morose swig of Jones' Infallible Elixir. Later he took another dose. After still another jolt he hobbled into the dance-hall for some of the real stuff.

Nothing is more disillusioning than a dance-hall barroom at mid-morning. Gone are music, dancers, horse-play and the swaying of colorful humanity. The clean, bright morning sunlight mocks bleared faces, headaches, hangovers and the odor of stale beer.

Old Pete hobbled to the bar and took a generous portion of fighting spirit to cheer his lonesome soul. Along the bar two tall, square-faced, black-mustached bullies were talking. Both had guns and prominent cartridge-belts, both wore high-topped boots with spurs, and both had broad-brimmed hats.

The one with his back to old Pete was by far the more impressive as he wore silver trimmings on his holsters and a fancy brown-and-white cowhide vest that was quite the niftiest thing in town.

Pete was soon all attention. The imposing person was Jed Hill, king-pin of all the scoundrels. Pete did not know him personally; but the leader turned and Pete was forced into immediate acquaintance.

"Howdy. How's things up in your country?"

"Oh, all right, I guess."

"I hear you struck it rich."

Pete was almost floored, but he did not show it. His emotions were schooled in a land where a display of emotion was not advisable. He kept a poker face.

"Sounds good. Where did you git all that?"

"Oh, somebody blabbed. It's all over town."

"Huh! It's funny how people know more about my business than I do myself."

"Yeh. Ain't it. Let's see—you've been working over in the Jaguar Range east of here, haven't you?"

"No. I been workin' the country north-east-by-south of here."

"Oh, all right. Go to the ——."

The big gang-leader deliberately turned his back. The old prospector's red face purpled. He hobbled out, sat down, and muttered toward the hitching-racks in front of the porch.

"I hear you struck it rich," came a voice alongside him.

Old Pete did not deign to look up.

"Go to the ——," he snarled.

A FORM in tattered corduroys slid to a sitting position beside him. Pete turned and looked into the wrinkled face of an old crony, a white-headed, tobacco-stained senior desert-rat who had crossed Pete's trail often through the years.

"Oh," said Pete, extending a hand. "'Lo, Mike. How's things?"

"Oh, so-so. Just got into town yistiday. They said you'd struck it rich."

"That's good news. Who told you?"

"I disremember. It's all over town. How about it? Will it be time to celebrate a bit?"

Old Pete shook a doleful head.

"You've got it all twisted."

"Well."

The newcomer lighted a pipe, taking his time.

"I thought mebbe you'd made a strike. Still, if you did make it I'd not blame ye fer keepin' your mouth shut."

He looked about cautiously.

"It's no time to be findin' a good claim in this country. Still, if the divil was to give me a little luck and send me a good claim, I'd know what to do."

Pete also filled his pipe slowly, betraying no curiosity.

"What would you do?"

"I'd go down to San Francisco."

"Yeh. And git your claim jumped."

"No. It'd be me own secret. I'd keep quiet till I got in front of a bunch of millionaires. Then I'd plump down me samples and, 'Gintlemen,' I'd say, 'here's the gold. I've got tons of it. Come down and help me get it out. Then we'll all be rich.' "

"But millionaires is rich already."

"Yeh, but was there ever one that didn't want more?"

"I dunno. Millionaires is out of my line."

"Well, they do. Don't you read the papers? Between scandals and divorces and races and chorus-gels and what-not, millionaires has to hustle for more millions or else they go broke. Here. Take a look at this."

Mike reached back and produced a lurid feature section of a pioneer "yellow" Sunday newspaper, two weeks old but just arrived. Mike's pudgy finger pointed to a page shrieking with headlines about a capitalist who got his son out of jail. There were pictures of father, son, two chorus-girls shot by the son, the jail where the son resided, a diagram of his cell, his menu, a group picture of the seventeen lawyers who got him out presumably at a cost of a million dollars, and a diagram showing how far a million dollars would go if placed end to end.

"There," remarked Mike. "There's a sample. Now a millionaire like that'd be needin' money. It stands to reason."

"I reckon he would."

"All right then. If I had a bang-up mine I'd corral a bunch of millionaires. I'd show 'em where they'd make money."

"How would they go about it?"

Old Mike had studied high finance from lurid newspaper accounts during his long, lonely travels over hill and plain. He always took a stack of papers into the desert. He knew all about finance.

"That's easy. Form a corporation—a big minin'-company."

"Then what?"

"Then go to work. These rapscallions around here might grab a few ore-wagons, but they couldn't lift a whole corporation, could they?"

"I dunno. They've lifted the whole county. What's a corporation compared to that?"

"Yes; but a corporation ain't so easy to pull up. She's spread out too much—San Francisco, Sacramento, here and all over. Them bandits can't ketch hold of it. There ain't enough bandits."

Old Pete was interested. He had seen a big mining-plant or two with their imposing buildings, and he visualized a similar possibility for his own claim. But he kept his poker face.

"Mebbe you're right," he admitted. "But where would you git the million dollars?"

"From the millionaires."

"Yeh."

Old Pete arose slowly and dusted himself.

"Mebbe you've got a good idee; but for folks like us it ain't practical."

"Why?"

"We don't know no millionaires."

To Mike it was a crusher. He had worked out his dream-plan in case he ever found a good mine, and now old Pete had knocked it into a cocked hat with five careless words. It made Mike exasperated.

"Aw, shut up," he snapped. "Why, you or'nary old blister, you ain't the kind that ever will. I wasn't speakin' of you. I was jest figgerin' in case a gen'leman found a mine."

PETE stared at him thoughtfully for a moment, then turned with dignity and hobbled down the street. He refused to enter into controversy; but he admired Mike's general idea, so he lumbered around and picked up seven copies of San Francisco newspapers which he took to his room. With the aid of a blunt finger he slowly spelled out whole columns of telegraph news, sports, styles, scandals, editorials and everything else while seeking for light on the best methods of floating mining-corporations.

Each headline gave him a new sensation. Each picture furnished a jolt. In his lonely life Pete had forgotten civilization and now it was pulsing under his hands.

He read about a big coming prize-fight. He noted the pictures of shapely choruses in musical shows. He observed the advertisements of good cafés and rare wines. He began to realize he had missed something in the years that were passed.

"I've got to go to the city," he decided. "Mike was right. If I could only git in touch with a millionaire——"

His eye caught a boisterous advertisement of a flagrant mining-"company." He read it from top to bottom, glowing at every howling rhapsody.

There! That was the way to float a mine! Tell people about it! Sock it to 'em! Give 'em both barrels! If he could start something like that, all would be well.

"Durn it, I'll start as soon as I can see Tom!" he exclaimed. "That's the ticket. No use to stick in this slow town."

A yell came from down-stairs. There was a crash of glass, a thump and a shot. Twenty voices shrieked.

Pete looked out of his paneless window. He saw a slim person in shirt sleeves hurtle out of the dance-hall below. The man leaped on a pinto pony, slashing it with a quirt and crouching low over its neck while it streaked up the street.

From the dance-hall rushed two profane men with six-shooters in their hands. They fired like mad and ran into the street. The fleeing person turned a corner and disappeared.

Pete went down-stairs two steps at a time. In the barroom a crowd was gathering around a limp form on the sawdust. There was an awed quietness in their manner. Folks were speaking in low tones.

"What's the trouble?" Pete asked of a cattleman.

"One of Johnny Finley's gang slipped in and killed Ed Wainwright. Right in broad daylight! Right in Jed Hill's favorite saloon! Gosh!"

Old Pete clucked sympathetically.

"What'd he kill him for?"

"Jest devilment, I guess. He came in here, right in the middle of four-five men. He grabbed Wainwright's gun-hand and cussed him out. Wainwright threw a glass with his free hand. Then the feller shot him. Right in the middle of Jed Hill's crowd! Gosh, what nerve!"

"What did the crowd do? Nothin'?"

"Not a darned thing. Jest stood like they was paralyzed. It happened before they had time to wake up."

"What'll Jed Hill say?"

"I dunno. Here he comes now. Guess I'll back out. I don't want no dealin's with Jed Hill—not me!"

The masterful leader of the gangs strode through the door. All eyes turned toward him. Sensing something amiss, he went forward alertly, halting at sight of the body and stooping over it.

"Who did that?" he demanded.

A member of the retinue made low-voiced explanations. Jed Hill's cold eyes narrowed. He nodded once or twice while he looked around, seeking certain men. His lips curled with scorn.

"What were you fellers doin' meantime?" he demanded.

There was a jumble of words while four men tried to speak at once; but Hill cut them short.

His punishment was swift. He picked one man for the example, and his subsequent actions were not pleasant to witness. It was deliberate ferocity, aimed to punish, and to uphold the Hill prestige.

The victim was battered with fist, boot and gun-butt. The crowd was thoroughly cowed.

At length Hill calmed down. When next he spoke he was comparatively mild. He seemed to be addressing the still form on the sawdust, but his voice reached to every corner of the room.

"Johnny Finley and his gang's got a little too fresh. I've been wantin' peace, but we can't have peace. All right. From now on we'll make war. Get Johnny Finley and his crowd dead or alive."

Jed Hill spoke truth when he said he wanted peace. The fed lion does not want to hunt. Hill did not want to fight. His leadership was absolute and his income assured from many sources.

Gambling-tables and liquor-stills paid him percentages. Investments in predatory enterprises often brought good profits. So did dance-hall girls. And other enterprises. Hill did not want war, but he could not overlook this recent affront.

"Who's with me?" he roared. "Put up your right hands. I want to know."

Hands shot into the air by the dozen. A few on the fringes held aloof, including old Pete, who got out. Certain quiet remarks on the fringes showed Pete that the leader's arrogance was breeding future trouble, but Pete had his own perplexities.

EVENING came. Night came. Strolling about town after supper, Pete snuffed a vague excitement in the air as if folks were expecting something unpleasant to happen. The old prospector's intangible sixth sense bade him keep out of it so he slipped his ragged blankets out of the "hotel" and made himself a bed in the corner of a moonlit corral on the outskirts of town.

"I've gotta go to the city," he yawned as he curled up for the night. "This here town's too durned excitable."

Ten minutes later his loud snores were desecrating the night. Two hours later he awoke at the sound of distant popping and raised his head over the corral-bars to look into town, where the lights of the buildings glared into the street. There was trouble afoot; but it was none of Pete's business, so he went to sleep again.

Within twenty minutes he awoke. To his ears came the crunching of many boots approaching from the town. It was a mob—a quiet mob that wasted few words.

They passed the last saloon and turned toward the corral with the moonbeams throwing strange lights and shadows on their figures and armament.

Pete scrambled to his knees and watched over the fence. The crowd turned toward a cottonwood-tree a few hundred feet away. When they came closer he began to distinguish figures. They seemed to be guarding some one in the center of the mass.

Pete was about to witness a moonlight hanging.

The old desert-rat was tough, but it gave him the creeps. It was a business-like affair. Too business-like for dramatics. Necessary words were spoken in low tones. Even the victim was silent and preoccupied.

"Glory!" snorted Pete. "It's a passel of rascals hangin' some other rascal! Happy days!"

The crowd reached the town's lone cottonwood-tree, and its members could be seen making certain quiet preparations.

"Swing him high," came a hoarse voice. "Put him where Finley can see him from the mountains."

Another voice was heard, more somber in tone—

"Have you got anything to say?"

The victim's snarling voice arose in a volley of profanity and vituperation.

"Let 'er go!" commanded a voice.

Old Pete turned away, not caring to watch it. He collected his blankets and slipped around the corner of the corral, starting for town again. His sleep was broken. He was irritated, disgusted and stricken with a sense of hopeless odds.

"They hang folks like they was the governor of the State," he muttered. "No more law and order'n a pack of wolves. Me and Tom has a fine chance in this country, ain't we?

"Mike was right. We gotta be a corporation."

Pete stumped up the street in search of lodging, plodding past lively dance-halls and saloons where jangling music thrummed loudly. Pete made for the other end of town. A broad-shouldered man stepped off a board sidewalk and blocked his way.

"Tom!" exclaimed Pete. "What are you doin' here? What's the matter?"

"Nothing's the matter. Nothing except that Finley and his crowd know all about our claim. I shot Finley this morning."

"Happy days!"

"Not by a long shot. Finley's badly hurt, but his whole crowd's at the water-hole. They're spreading all over the country to look for the mine."

Pete's lips quivered, then stiffened.

"Come on. Let's git away from people. Tell me about it. I want to know."

Tom led the way to a bare knoll just behind the main street and recited his adventures, also learning of Pete's general doings. When it was over the old desert-rat rose and straightened, with the moonlight throwing his grotesque shadow along the hill.

"We're licked," he snarled. "Licked to a frazzle. Shall we quit?"

"We're not dead, are we?"

"I knew you'd say that. That's what I was waitin' to hear. All right. What shall we do?"

"We might join Hill's gang and fight it out with the Finleys."

"What—me a bandit? No, sir! I'd be a —— of a bandit, wouldn't I? Besides, there ain't nothin' in it except gittin' shot. We can do that anyhow."

"All right," drowsed Tom. "I pass. What's your idea?"

"We'll incorporate."

Tom, though exhausted and sleepy, looked up sharply.

"What?"

Pete explained his session with Mike, going into details. Tom studied thoughtfully.

"I hadn't thought of that. It might work if we can find the right people. We'll think it over. I'm tired. Let's find a place to sleep."

They sought another frowzy "hotel." Next morning Tom considered while Pete ambled about town. Tom felt that the scheme was possible. He knew a man in

San Francisco who promoted things and perhaps——

TOM decided to try it. He preferred to go to the city because he knew city ways and old Pete didn't; but Pete's lame foot made him useless in the desert and the rougher job was palpably up to Tom. Besides, Pete wanted to go; and there wasn't money enough for two.

Pete knew he was going. His mind was set. As a preliminary he entered the town's largest store. He wanted to look like a real city person. He knew that strangers had trouble up there from bunco men at times so he wanted to disguise himself as a regular blasé city dude.

He bought a new pair of top boots, some heavy woolen socks, a dicky shirt with celluloid collars, a green striped necktie and a wrinkled brown-black suit of clothes, selected from underneath a pile of other suitings. It reeked of newness and had price-tags all over it.

Pete then purchased a new Stetson hat and felt thoroughly equipped for city life. He started out with the package under his arm.

Tom came out of the post-office, stuffing a letter into a pocket. His face looked dazed. Pete halted and stared at him.

"Tom!" he roared. "What's the matter?"

Tom jumped. He took Pete's arm silently and started down the street.

"What's the matter?" insisted the old prospector, when they were away from other people.

"Something hit me," confessed Tom. "I'll be all right in a minute. Forget it."

"Well, I've got four hundred dollars salted away. If that'll do any good——"

"No. Thanks just the same. It isn't anything like that. It's sort of a private matter."

"I'm your partner," replied Pete insistently.

"Yes, but— Well, I'll tell you for fear you worry about it. It doesn't affect the mine. It's something else. My girl's going to marry some other fellow."

III

THE stage for the county seat rollicked up to the hotel porch at mid-morning and halted to take on passengers, including Pete and Tom. Pete had many long miles to travel beyond the county seat before he reached the railroad. Tom was merely headed for the United States Land Office to file on the claim.

They had decided to file. Their secret was a secret no longer.

Tom's confession had jolted Pete, but the old fellow understood Tom's feelings. There was once a blond waitress in a Boise City hashery— But that was in the past.

"There must be some way to fix it up," suggested Pete a mile out of town, while the stage was rocking over sand-covered plains.

"I'm afraid it's too late. It's all settled except the date of the wedding."

"That's worse'n I thought!" Pete lighted his pipe and his face hardened. "Mebbe sometimes a feller's luckier than he knows. When a gal goes back on a feller after his back's turned——"

"You're wrong."

"You said she threw you down, didn't you?"

"No. She didn't."

"Then what in tarnation— Oh! Mebbe the man——"

"He's a thorough gentleman even if he is old enough to be her father. Decent fellow. Richard K. Wentworth. Owns Hawaiian plantations and things. Wealthy. Belongs to all the big clubs. Quite a man."

"Well, I'm durned! She didn't throw you down, and yet she's goin' to marry this other gent! What sort of a shindig is this?"

Tom hated to talk. In his pocket was a piteous, helpless letter whose renunciatory words burned like fire. It was all the worse because Tom could do nothing. But he had to explain lest Pete get distorted ideas.

"We've known each other all our lives. Schoolmates. We've been engaged secretly more than a year. Her father was wealthy, but lost all his money before he died. Her mother had a hard time getting along. She objected to me because I didn't have any money, so I hit for this country, hoping to make a quick stake. I didn't make it in time."

"Well, why don't her mother leave things alone?"

"A woman used to luxury can't adapt herself to poverty. That's why many mothers try to make what is called a 'good match' for their daughters. In a way it's self-preservation. But I guess I've talked about enough."

"Happy days!" snorted Pete. "Then they sell gals in society like they used to sell niggers down in Tennessee."

"Don't say that. You don't understand. It's the game."

"And the gal stands for it?"

Tom was tired of it.

"I guess you've got me wrong, Pete. Maybe my talk's sounded too conceited. Maybe I've led you to believe that I've only got to whistle and the girl will come running.

"It isn't like that at all. She's engaged to a man she likes sincerely. The engagement's announced in public. That's all there is to it."

Pete's brows knit. If Pete had been the victim Pete would have pulled San Francisco up by the roots. He couldn't understand Tom's lack of rancor. Social usage was a critter that had never strayed in Pete's pathway.

"Hadn't you better go to the city?" he suggested.

"No. I've got to watch that mine. We haven't funds enough for both to go. Besides, I don't care to go and you do."

"Why in tarnation don't you take a chance and tell the gal you're rich anyhow?"

"We may have a long battle for the mine. Besides, she's engaged."

"Happy days!"

The stage rattled on for another mile, throwing columns of dust rearward. Pete was bewildered and befuddled. This fool society business was outlandish, yet Tom bowed his head in submission to the outrage. To Pete a few sane, natural actions were badly needed.

"Does this here gal live in a stylish house?" asked Pete guilelessly.

"Yes. A big English mansion with rose-gardens all around it. It's on Pacific Avenue almost directly over the Golden Gate. I don't blame the mother for wanting to keep it."

"Pacific? From all I hear that's the toughest street in San Francisco."

"You're thinking of Pacific Street. This is Pacific Avenue."

Pete dropped the subject. He had heard the name of the girl, and now he practically knew the address.

Once or twice in the long journeys across plain and mountain-range Tom had mentioned one Helen Masters guardedly during moments of confidence inspired by moonlight or camp-fire; but neither Tom nor Pete was given to gushing about his deeper feelings, and only Tom's halting inflection had betrayed his real thoughts about her. Pete never forgot it.

And now he knew where she lived. All was well.

At the county seat Tom gave his partner a final injunction.

"Keep away from Pacific Street, Pete. If you do go, bank most of your money before you start.

"I've given you letters of introduction to Bill Elliott and a lot of other folks. Elliott was a classmate of mine in college. If he can't help you one of the others will.

"When you deal with a promoter, look out. If one of 'em makes a business proposition get into touch with me. We're willing to meet him half-way but we won't give him our hides by a long shot."

Tom was not taking such long chances as it might seem. He knew that Pete was only one-half of the partnership, and his actions were not binding unless Tom concurred. Pete was just the scout.

THEY went to the Land Office and registered their claim before a satirical government employee, after which there was a last handshake and the stage down-country clattered around the corner of the rickety county jail and Pete disappeared.

Tom returned next day to Escalante. That night there was jollification in the principal dance-hall, caused by the news that some son-of-a-gun had shot Johnny Finley.

The news had come *via* one of the underground sources with which the country abounded. Rumor had it that Finley was lying half-dead somewhere; but that only speeded the celebration.

Tom watched it till two sots tried to shoot each other, and then he went to bed. He was lonely.

Next afternoon, planning a visit to his mine, Tom happened to pass the dance-hall. Seated on the creaky porch was Jed Hill with his brown-white vest open for coolness. Hill swung from the chair and carelessly crossed Tom's path.

"Howdy," said Hill.

"How," nodded Tom.

"Are you the feller in cahoots with Pete Dolliver?"

"He's my partner, yes."

Hill fumbled thoughtfully with his black mustache.

"Come inside. I want to talk with you."

Tom was curious, so he went. Soon they were seated at a table in a little side-room off the dance-hall.

Hill ordered refreshments while Tom studied his face. It was the first time Tom had been close to a high-class blackleg, and he found this specimen rather pleasing to look at. Except for repellent eyes the man was almost handsome, and his manner was quite ingratiating.

"I understand you've found a good claim," opened Hill.

"Who told you?"

"A fellow just in from the county seat. He said you'd had 'er recorded."

"That's true. It's funny, though, how news travels."

"Nothin' funny about it. It's business. For instance, I knew about your claim almost as soon as you found it."

"How?"

"Oh, one of Finley's crowd told us."

"I thought you were fighting Finley."

"We are, but we've got friends among 'em. Maybe they've got friends in our crowd. I'd like to catch any!"

Tom noted the system of spies and counter-spies, but Hill's voice demanded attention.

"What are you goin' to do with your claim?"

"Develop it."

"You'll need a little help, won't you?"

"Not that I know of."

"You don't understand. You can't work this claim alone. What you need is help."

"Not just now."

"Yes you do. You need help."

Tom caught the hint.

"Oh! What might you suggest?"

"Well, I might find you a third partner. Maybe somebody strong enough to hold people off you."

"Jed Hill?"

"Not openly."

"What sort of partnership were you thinking about?"

"Halves. You and Pete Dolliver'd be one-half. I'd be the other."

Tom almost admired the man's nerve. He was no cheap freebooter, that was certain! But Tom had to play a cautious game. It was getting more dangerous every day.

"I don't know," he considered. "It's a pretty stiff proposition."

"It might be stiffer. You need help. No two ways about it. You need help."

Tom boldly led a trump card. He had been on the defensive about enough.

"Yes, but maybe you need a little of my help too."

Tom was beginning to have an idea or two. With luck he could take advantage of this Hill-Finley feud.

"What do you mean?" demanded Hill.

"Do you know who shot Finley? I did."

"You?"

Hill sat back and appraised Tom keenly. The gambler knew men, and he gaged this one as honest, earnest and fairly shrewd, though certain little mannerisms betrayed traces of the odious pink-tea caste in spite of his square jaw and calloused hands.

"How'd you happen to shoot Finley?" demanded Hill.

Tom told a frank story. The location of his mine was now a public record anyhow, so he gave all the details. When Tom finished Jed Hill smiled sardonically.

"You buncoed him. He'll never forgive you. You should have finished him."

"I'm leaving that to you. If you hadn't chased him into the brush he'd never have come across me."

"I'll chase him some more."

"Well, you'd better have a good-sized crowd with you. The Finley gang's pretty strong."

"I know they are. But where are they? That's the only thing I can't find out."

"Do you know where Travelers' Well is, out on the sand-flat near the Jaguar Hills? The Finley crowd's operating from the well. They're looking for my claim."

Hill jumped as if struck. He snapped his chair back.

"What? How many are there?"

"Oh, about a half-dozen. Why?"

Hill did not wait to answer. He turned, ran outside, yelled toward some bar-loungers and disappeared on the street.

Tom, wondering, went outside in the wake of the hurrying men. He watched Hill lead a crowd on the jump toward a corral around on a side-street.

"Now, what's this all about?" muttered Tom.

More men trotted toward the corral, one of them adjusting the sling of a Winchester. From around the corner came the sound of many horses being roped and saddled.

Then came a clatter of pounding hoofs. A dozen armed horsemen swirled into the main street and thundered past. Belated riders followed them. They turned into the eastward trail, leaving a cloud of dust.

A BEWILDERED, Tom sought information from an old Mexican man-about-town. The Mexican was hard to start, but finally he talked.

"There may be funerals, no?"

"Whose funerals?"

"Only the saints can tell."

"There's not a saint in the whole crowd, or anywhere near. Who's Jed Hill out after?"

"His own men. Who else?"

"Why?"

"To rescue them."

"Who from?"

"Did you not hear Jed Hill call? Shonny Feenley has caught one-two-three Jed Hill men. A trap. Maybe kill them."

"A trap? How did they get into that?"

"Yesterday, *señor*, somebody filed a claim for gold in the Jaguar Hills, no? The news came to Jed Hill very quick like it always does.

"Three men started from here to look at the claim for Jed Hill. They did not know Feenley men were there. They ride into what-you-call ambush, no?"

Tom took a long breath.

"Well, of all the enterprise I ever saw this country beats the deck. The minute a man files on a claim these pirates send a delegation to look it over."

Tom consumed the rest of the day in irritable reflections.

Next afternoon a very small portion of the cavalcade returned, dusty and travel-worn. One man wore a sling to hold his limp left arm.

They all looked tired except Jed Hill, who rode in the lead like Cæsar returning from the wars. After dismounting, he walked into the crowded dance-hall. Tom followed. Hill happened to spy him.

"Much obliged," bawled Hill, waving a hand. "If it hadn't been for you them three friends of mine would have been dead. We found 'em standin' off a half a dozen on a hill."

"Where's the rest of your crowd?" questioned Tom.

"Them? Oh, one of 'em was shot up and the rest went on into the Jaguar Hills."

"What for?"

"They're goin' to take claims alongside yours."

IV

TO FIND a promoter at the right time is a stately task. To interest a well-financed promoter who will make a proposition successful from the start is a miracle. Old Pete did it; but his methods made it a super-miracle.

When Pete landed at the foot of Market Street, clad in his wrinkly store clothes, creaky boots, green necktie and sun-blistered complexion, every bunco man in the district gave a glad cry and got busy; but Pete fought them off. Alone and with no one to guide him, he waded forth into the pitfalls of a great city.

Banking the bulk of his money religiously, Pete kept a hundred dollars to experiment with the city's pleasures. He was still experimenting at midnight.

There were plenty of opportunities in the old San Francisco. The gay, colorful, tragic city was alive with them. The siren voice, the crimsoned lip and the rattle of chips were as frank as the booming of breakers on faraway Seal Rock.

In the heart of the business section at Fourth and Market, roulette and faro held forth in a royally named "café" whose operations were so open that the outside citizenry could watch through plate-glass windows.

Down the street, between other business houses, "Little Egypt" and kindred souls disported in a gaudy amusement place for the inelegant.

Just north of the city's main cable-slot was the tenderloin with its beer-halls, tough dives, theaters and world-famous restaurants. South of the "slot" were the homes of lowly but bellicose citizens thoroughly trained to the manly art and always willing to prove it.

To the northward was the Barbary Coast, where lights burned brilliantly amid dance-halls, saloons, brothels and tawdry theaters where throbbing music advertised brazen shows. This district was one huge leaven of drunken sailors, gang-fights, vendettas, hold-ups, graft, knockout-drops, shootings and general confusion. A policeman's career in this district was generally short.

But that was only part of this wonderful dream-city, still tingling with memories of Stevenson, Bret Harte, Mark Twain and the argonauts. Artists, musicians, sculptors and actors were starting world careers. Builders and artizans were laying the foundations for the great industrial world of the future.

Down at the Portrero the world's most powerful battle-ship was starting for sea. It was called the *Oregon*.

The venturesome Spreckels had completed the city's only skyscraper. "Lucky" Baldwin was in from Santa Monica to build his luckless hotel, planned to rival the Waldorf. Financiers, railroad magnates, merchant princes, globe-trotters, booted miners and tobacco-chewing cattlemen were meeting hourly at the old Palace or dining in restaurants whose viands they can still remember with a strange wistfulness.

The city made Pete dizzy, and his foot hurt. He continued to have trouble with that foot for more than a month until it healed, but he let it interfere with his actions as little as possible.

His first task was to seek Pacific Street and turn himself loose. On the fourth day he landed in jail. The fifth day he sobered up.

With his appropriation spent with proper sinfulness the old iner mbrushed his ruffled clothes and sallied forth from his temporary abode in a cheap Mission Street lodging-house to seek Bill Elliott. He found Elliott's office in a great business block filled with brisk men.

Elliott was tall, slim, blond and natty. When the red-faced old desert-rat with the skewered eyes and ill-fitting store clothes announced himself as Tom Hall's partner, Elliott's aristocratic eyebrows raised, but he opened Tom's letter without comment.

"It seems to be a pretty rough country down there," he observed at the finish. "I guess the life must have roughened Tom quite a bit. Too bad! Tom used to be quite a dandy. Well——

"About this mine. It's lucky you came straight here. Otherwise you'd have missed me."

Pete's face paled.

"I'm sailing for China this afternoon, so I'll not be able to do much for you; but suppose you let me see your samples."

Pete took off his coat and vest and lifted up the tails of his shirt. Elliott looked excited.

"Say—here—you needn't go to all that trouble!"

Pete groped under a red undershirt and produced a heavily laden money-belt which he threw with a thump upon a table.

"Look into that," he challenged.

Elliott opened one of its pockets and drew forth a handful of rock. His eyes opened wide.

"Ye gods! Do—do you mean to tell me you and Tom Hall discovered this?"

"Yep."

"Is much of it like this?"

"Them's our best samples. Some of the rock ain't so good, but the average is pretty high."

Elliott was palpably stricken with the samples.

"I've got to go to China. It's business. But if your mine's anything like this I want to share in it. You and Tom are right. Make it a corporation."

He picked a hat off a rack.

"Get your clothes on quick. Come on."

"Where to?"

"We'll see Markum. He's a big promoter. Mines and things. I've done him a favor or two. Hurry up!"

MARKUM'S office was a high-tension establishment peopled by clerks, messengers and hawk-faced gentlemen whose clothes needed brushing. These latter congregated at a railing till a stout and lavishly dressed personage appeared from his inside office. Then their voices arose in clamor. The stout man laughed and winked at Elliott.

"What'll I do with these wolves?" he asked. "I can't kill 'em. They're all good stock salesmen."

He turned to the crowd and spoke to each one in a chaffing way that veiled cold business.

"No, Charlie; what you need is black coffee. All right, Joe; here's your five hundred. Get out of here, Ed, and don't come back till you're sober. Here's a fifty, Steve. Enjoy yourself.

"No, boys. There's nothing doing today. Come around tomorrow."

When the last predatory supplicant left, the stout man turned to Elliott.

"That's the trouble of bein' a promoter. If I can't find work for those sharks I've got to support 'em or else they quit me. It just keeps me on the jump, findin' work for 'em. When they do clean up they hit for the races or play the high life. Broke in a week.

"Right now the whole tribe's on my neck. We just floated a big company, and I haven't got anything for 'em to sell."

"Maybe I can fix that," said Elliott.

The stout man's little eyes contracted.

"Oh. Come into my office."

Pete followed Elliott into a luxurious room planned to impress investors, whether millionaires or pikers. Pete felt awed amid such magnificence. In the presence of mahogany, costly carpets, priceless vases and exquisite pictures the old desert-rat was so stupefied that he handed over his money-belt almost apologetically when asked to produce it.

"You simply can't let this proposition pass without looking into it," urged Elliott.

The blue of Markum's eyes glinted steely at sight of the yellow-streaked samples. He produced a cigar, soon clenched by a puffy jaw, and drummed on the table or jiggled in his swivel-chair. He was one of nature's rarities, a nervous fat man.

"Looks good," he admitted gruffly.

"It is good," Pete found courage to say.

The little promoter's cold eyes seemed to bore through him.

"Where's your mine?"

Pete described it.

"Got good title to it?"

Pete explained that. The promoter waved aside his descriptions of gunmen and tough citizens. Those were side issues.

"Nobody in it but you and your partner, this fellow Hall?"

"No, sir."

Markum turned to Elliott, whose social position claimed his deference.

"I might look into it, Mr. Elliott. Of course it'll take some time—got to get reports from experts—but if it's anything like the samples I might take a flyer if it's only to keep my salesmen busy."

"I hope you can. Tom Hall was an old friend of mine and I want to see him succeed."

Elliott arose.

"If you take it up notify my attorneys so I can invest a little. I must be going."

Elliott soon disappeared. Markum turned his full attention on Pete and squeezed out every ounce of information the miner possessed.

When this third degree was over the promoter arose. The suavity he had bestowed on Elliott was gone. His manner was gruff and curt.

"I've promised I'd look into this, and I will. I'm goin' to send two minin' engineers down there to look it over. You tell your partner to meet 'em. I'll give you five days. Be here Friday afternoon."

Pete trod on air as he returned to the gas-lighted room in his cheap lodging-house. The terse, snappy, business-like air of the promoter impressed him as much as the promoter's overpowering office. Pete felt rich already.

THIS next job was to find Pacific Avenue. Casting out most of the traces of Pacific Street, Pete started next morning on his self-appointed mission.

But when the funny little cable-car bumped along a picturesque street and brought him into an environment of palatial homes and walled gardens he grew a little nervous. What in thunder was he going to say to the girl anyhow?

The conductor knew the house, and the car brought Pete to his destination inexorably. Dumped off in front of rose-gardens and shrubbery that fronted a brown-and-white English mansion with gabled roof and latticed windows, Pete found his heart fluttering strangely. It looked easy enough in the desert but here things seemed different.

"Well," he finally decided, "they can't do no worse'n kick me out. Here goes."

He strode manfully to the doorway and rang the bell. After a time the door was opened and Pete found himself in the presence of a pretty, neatly dressed blond girl with rather bold eyes.

Pete gulped. He stared and took off his hat. He stood on one foot and then the other. Perspiration began to roll down his face.

The girl stared back. Apparently she was waiting for him to speak. He drew a breath and took the plunge.

"Tom's rich," he blurted.

The girl looked blank.

"Who is?"

"Tom. Tom Hall."

The girl stared some more.

"Well, what do I care?"

Pete stepped back. His jaw dropped Then it clenched. His beard jutted out belligerently and his eyes blazed with wrathful contempt.

"No, I reckon you don't. I guess I've got you sized up now. It's about like I thought. You ain't good enough to care for anybody or anything. If I'd 'a' known Tom Hall was wastin' his time with anything like you I'd 'a' taken a punch at his fool head if it cost me my life. You? Oh, ——!"

The crimson-faced girl made a quick motion to slam the door just as Pete discerned a figure in white behind her.

"What is the matter?" came a quiet voice.

"This man's crazy," snapped the blonde. "He came up here and started gabbin' somethin' about some Tom Hall. Then he got insulting. The nerve of him!"

"Oh." Quietly. "I'd better attend to this, Mary. Go up-stairs."

"Mary?" exclaimed Pete. "That ain't the name I'm after. Her name's Helen."

"I am Helen. Won't you come in?"

"Oh. Excuse me. Yes, ma'am."

While Pete's hulking figure swung through the door he revised his opinion of Tom's girl. It was not that she was slim, graceful and owned a straight profile, nor was it her smooth skin or intelligent brown eyes. It was her expression that counted. She was not so super-beautiful, but her face had a wholesomeness that made up for any defects.

Somehow Pete felt more at ease. He accepted a chair in a great drawing-room and quit fiddling with his broad-brimmed hat, though the elegance of the house awed him. The gilded mirrors, tasseled draperies, plush chairs and marble mantel were in those days the height of grandeur.

As he appraised the place the old desert-rat doubted that these people were "broke." Expensive splendor was on every side. He knew nothing of mortgages or a struggle to keep it up. He saw only what he saw.

But the girl had seated herself. He cleared his throat.

"I'm Pete Dolliver. Tom Hall's pardner."

The girl recovered quickly.

"Then I am very glad to meet you indeed. How is he?"

"He's all right, ma'am. You might say he's considerable improved. Fact is, I reckon he's rich."

"Why—that's wonderful! If ever a man deserved it, Tom Hall does. If you only knew how he has struggled since childhood— But how did it happen?"

"It ain't happened yet, ma'am, but it looks as if it will. Me and Tom stumbled on to the finest vein of gold-ore you ever seen."

"And you own it?"

"Yes, ma'am. Every inch of it."

"Why, that's splendid. I couldn't be more pleased if I had found it myself. Did—did Tom send you here to tell me?"

"No, ma'am. He doesn't know I came. He doesn't even know I know where you live."

"Oh!"

Helen's eyes rounded as she gazed at the awkward old fellow, and then she looked at the tips of her ties.

"It's very kind of you to tell me this, Mr. Dolliver," she remarked gently. "I fully appreciate your courtesy."

Pete's skewered eyes caught the glint of a handsome diamond ring on her left hand. He decided to start something.

"YOU'RE goin' to git married, ain't you?"

She flushed, but the wrinkle-faced stranger did not mean to be offensive.

"Yes," she admitted.

Her voice seemed to plead against continuing the subject. Pete caught the vague inflection and made amends.

"Tom says he's a pretty decent sort of a feller."

"Tom would say something like that."

"Yes, ma'am. He's a game sport, but that don't git him anything."

"Get him anything?"

She looked at Pete, puzzled.

"Mr. Dolliver, just what was your motive in coming here today?"

"Me? Why, I thought mebbe I could straighten things out."

"Straighten what out?"

It was exceedingly awkward. Pete fervently wished he were out of it—preferably on some hot, blistery, ant-covered sand-hill where he could feel more at home. Hopelessly stumped, he finally obeyed a natural instinct to smash his way out, letting the wreckage fall where it might.

"Tom said you'd given him the go-by so you could marry some other feller."

The utter impertinence of this intimate remark from a total stranger made Helen catch her breath. The color left her face. She could only stare.

Pete managed to get it after a while.

Something inside his brain kept yelling, "Fool!" till he wanted to kick himself.

"I'm old enough to be your daddy, miss, and I'm Tom's pardner," he explained lamely. "I thought mebbe I could help Tom."

She appraised the rough old desert-rat with more sympathy, but she was still shaken.

"How—what did Tom tell you?" she asked, coloring.

"Nothin' much, ma'am. He ain't the sort to spill everything about his business. He never said much till he got a letter at Escalante. Then he went up in the air."

Helen looked past the old miner absently.

"I jest wanted to help Tom," he finished.

"I understand," nodded Helen gently, "and I thank you."

She straightened and became more animated, switching the subject to the adventure of Tom and Pete in the hills. She never allowed the talk to become personal again.

Pete's story sounded to her ears like an epic. The narrator didn't miss any chances for artistic embellishments, either. She listened until Pete talked himself out and prepared to leave.

When Pete left he walked a block, still tingling from her handshake and friendly farewell. Then he stopped thoughtfully.

"She never said yes, no, or go to the——" he discovered. "I didn't git anywhere—not a foot. She didn't bounce me out, neither. Now I wonder what in tarnation she's thinkin'."

Helen wondered the same thing for the rest of the day.

Pete gave it up as a bad job.

IN FIVE days he reappeared in Markum's office to assist two shrewd-looking mining engineers in departing for the claim. Pete knew Tom was watching the mails at Escalante, so he did not worry about Tom's delayed reply. Escalante was far from the railroad.

In ten days the engineers returned. Their report went straight to Markum's office behind closed doors.

"Holy smoke—it's a bonanza!" ejaculated one of them. "I've seen some pretty fair-looking prospects, but this one beats 'em all."

"If you don't grab it you're crazy," exclaimed the other.

The fat little promoter rolled a luscious cigar in his mouth and appraised his minions coldly.

"Gimme a full report. Show me!"

They showed him, filling his table with rough sketches and diagrams. Markum began to drum on the chair-arm and his eyes developed a strange glitter.

"Then you think it's worth puttin' money into?"

"Yes," urged one of them. "Grab on to that old hayseed while he's still got it. I tell you, the claim's dripping with color."

Markum decided with a snap.

"All right. I'll take your word for it. Here! I want you fellers to draw up a report. Make it hot! Make it sizzle! Make it read like the United States mint! Write it so every sucker in town'll mob the place for stock. Now get out of here and get busy."

When Pete was notified of Markum's decision his joy knew no bounds. But Markum was strictly business. As he looked over the old desert-rat's ungainly figure, clad in the wrinkled store clothes and betraying dog-like gratitude in his skewered eyes, Markum could scarce realize that a boob like this could have anything worth while. The promoter made the conversation short.

"We're goin' to form a million-dollar corporation. Half promotion stock. I take half of that for puttin' the thing through. I pay you and your partner the other half for the mine. See? We'll own fifty-one per cent. of the stock between us."

"You—you mean we give you the mine and only git a quarter of it back?"

"Naw. You sell the mine to the corporation for two hundred and fifty thousand dollars' worth of stock."

That looked better.

"Well, I reckon that'll be all right with me. I dunno what Tom'll say, though."

"You'd better find out pretty quick. I want his written authorization as well as yours."

Pete wrote to Tom immediately. A reply came back in ten days:

> If the offer is made in good faith I accept it. Use this first page of my letter as authorization.

The second page, for Pete alone, admonished him to hire an attorney to guard his interests.

Pete fairly flew to Markum's office with the authorization.

"I'd better git a lawyer, hadn't I?"

"Go ahead. Get a regiment."

"I dunno. I ain't got much money. Stayin' in the city's costin' me a lot."

He hesitated a moment.

"Do you know any good lawyer that don't charge too much?"

"Sure. Here's a card. Gives his name and address."

In ten minutes Pete was back with a thin-faced attorney. Markum looked surprized.

"You do business in a hurry. Well, all right. Here!"

He jerked a thumb toward the lawyer.

"Write out a bill of sale for a minin' claim—this man'll describe it. The claim will be sold for consideration agreed upon by both parties. See?"

A paper replete with legal verbiage and land descriptions was soon completed and signed.

"All right," said the promoter. "That's all. Dolliver, you come back a week from today."

Pete scrawled a long report to Tom and returned when the week was up. Markum was brief.

"Bring up a chair. Sit down. Now. We're all ready to incorporate. Articles will be filed today. Dummy directors. One share each. My chief clerk's secretary and treasurer. You're president."

Pete nearly fell over. A president! President of a million-dollar corporation!

"Happy days!" he gasped. "Holy smoke! I wonder what Tom'll say."

"He'll say nothing. He's in it, isn't he?"

"Um. Yeh. I reckon it'll be all right. But— Gosh! I ain't quite got my bearin's yet! Jest—jest what am I supposed to do when I'm a president?"

"Sit still and don't rock the boat."

"Well—if that's all you want, Mr. Markum, I reckon I'll fill the bill."

"All right." The fat promoter turned to a clerk.

"Tell Metz I want him."

A GANGLING man in chair-worn clothes approached with a green eye-shade over his forehead.

"Mr. Dolliver—Mr. Metz," introduced Markum. "Metz is secretary and treasurer. Dolliver's president. Metz, bring all the papers about the Escalante Bonanza Minin'-Company here."

"The which?" shouted Pete.

"You heard it! Jessica sounds foolish. Jaguar's too wild-catty. We're givin' it a real name."

"You sure are," grunted Pete suspiciously.

"Oh, rats! We're changin' the name of your Jessica claim. It's the same mine under a different title."

He pushed a paper over with pudgy hands.

"There's a resolution by the board of directors authorizin' the new name. You're president. Sign when you're ready."

Pete read it and finally obeyed.

"All right," snapped Markum. "Now we're started. We'll put this through quick."

He pondered for a moment. His clerks were gone and he could talk privately.

"Do you need any money?"

"N-no. I've got enough for a few weeks."

"I can advance you some if you want. It always comes in handy. We'll square it later."

And Markum's hand dived into a drawer and produced a roll of bills, also some gold.

"Um," considered Pete thoughtfully. "Well—if it don't put you out——"

"It won't. Here. Better take four or five hundred. Five hundred. All right."

Pete took the cash and signed a receipt, feeling much better. Standing hat in hand at the doorway, he turned to the promoter and made him look up from his work.

"Mr. Markum, I want to say you've acted like a white man. I—I reckon I was brought to the right place; and if this here mine's floated you've got a couple of friends who'll stand by you if—if you ever go broke on some other proposition that ain't so good. Us fellers down in the desert ain't much on style, but we've got darned good hearts."

Pete felt a trifle melodramatic so he covered immediately.

"Shoot that stock out quick—we want action."

Old Pete was not without dignity as he stood full-sized against the door as if framed for a painting of some gnarled old pioneer. But Markum wasn't studying pictures.

"All right," he laughed. "I'm busy,

get out of here. Come back day after tomorrow."

Pete appeared at the appointed time for minor business, but he wasn't feeling very spry. Worry and excitement had preyed on him. During the glad reaction he had gone to the Palace bar, where toasts to the mine were copiously drunk with cattle-kings and miners and ranchers. They slapped him on the back and called him "Mr. President." It was very gratifying indeed.

When Pete returned to his lodging-house he found a letter from Tom. He had walked through seven blocks of rain. He took off his dripping coat, doffed his soggy boots, looked into a cracked mirror to see what was the matter with him, and sank down on his bed to read the letter with blurred eyes.

The missive was concise, giving a rough outline of a struggle with the citizens of the hills. Then it touched on the corporation.

> Hurry things all you can (urged Tom) but don't let anything get away from you. I have an uneasy feeling that things are working almost too smoothly up there. I may be all wrong. Still, you had better let your lawyer review everything you do.
>
> Never forget to write every agreement with your promoter in black and white, so there can be no possible misunderstanding. Don't get tripped up on anything.

"Huh!" grunted Pete. "I don't git the idee. He wants us to hurry, and then he says things are goin' too smooth."

Pete pondered dully. His dizzy brain went over the events of the past few weeks, but he couldn't see a flaw.

AT DUSK he lighted a gas-jet and closed his one window against the slanting rain. The gaslight danced on the flowered red-and-yellow wall-paper and it soon made him bilious, so he went to bed. He placed his watch and a bottle on a chair within reach.

"Good old Jonesy," he muttered. "Jonesy'll fix me up all right. Jest a few swallers more and I'll be spry as a kitten—I wonder what in tarnation's the matter with me?"

At four in the morning the slattern landlady explored to see who was burning so much gas. The soughing of Pete's labored breath came over the transom. The landlady opened the door, gave one look and then flapped down-stairs to call a hospital. In a short time an ambulance arrived.

A white-clad medico entered and gazed at Pete with practised eye.

"Pneumonia," he announced.

V

WHEN Tom found that Jed Hill's choice collection of rascals and cut-throats were his intimate neighbors the young mine-owner was curious to know whether they would try to occupy his property.

He borrowed a horse and prepared with provisions and arms to start into the desert, planning to take an indirect route to the mine by cutting across the hills. Just as he was mounting, Jed Hill came into the dusty corral.

"Goin' to look at your claim?" asked Hill.

"I might," grunted Tom, rueful at being observed so quickly.

"Well, I haven't anything much to do. Mebbe I'll go with you. I'd like to look at it."

Tom sensed no direct danger from Hill just yet. The man was under obligations to him.

"All right," grunted Tom. "Come along."

As they rode on the sunlit trail, with here and there a yucca-palm or sentinel cactus to vary the monotonous sagebrush or alkali or plain yellow sand-flats, Hill developed talkativeness. His reminiscence embraced Arizona, Mexico and practically the whole West. Tom gathered that he had traveled largely and sometimes very fast.

With his tongue loosened Hill also made free comments on his followers. He was not idealistic about them.

"They're wolves. Hungry wolves."

"Still, they're getting restless. Maybe they think you're using too high a hand," suggested Tom.

"Yeh? Well, I'll keep it that way. There's only two sets of people here—them that I feed and them that starves. Savvy?

"Them that I feeds won't fight me. Them that starves ain't strong enough."

Tom saw what a piteous mess the country had become. The talk of starvation was literally true. All legitimate industry was dead. The robbers had preyed on one another till all were despoiled except the chief robber, who kept a retinue so that the others could not despoil him.

"It's a fine system," observed Tom. "How long will it last?"

"Till outsiders start comin' in."

Tom thought of his mining-company.

"Why?" he asked. "Do you mean to say you'll oppose new settlers or new capital?"

"Sure. Why not? I'm gettin' along all right. Look at my point of view. Why should I want conditions to change?"

"I see," nodded Tom. "I understand you perfectly."

THE forty-mile journey ended before nightfall. They turned into the cañon amid numerous signs of human traffic. Horses champed bits or munched hay from bags. Blankets and camp-litter lay scattered around.

There were men all over the place. The old solitude was broken.

On Tom's hillock sat a red-shirted, red-haired giant with hunched shoulders and a rifle. He had taken full possession. Hill rode up to him.

"This your claim?" demanded Hill.

"I dunno. Mebbe it is."

"It ain't. Get off."

"But——"

"Get off!"

The giant started away sulkily. The onlookers guffawed.

"I knew it wouldn't work," chuckled a lanky citizen, coming up with several others. "We all got other claims—see them monuments of ours?"

He waved his hand toward many piles of boundaries and location-notices.

"Red couldn't jump this claim," remarked Hill. "Didn't he know she was registered at the United States Land Office?"

The other grinned.

"The owners left, didn't they?"

"Yeh. But one of 'em's back." Hill jerked a thumb at Tom.

The lanky citizen appraised Tom. "Oh, all right," he acquiesced carelessly.

The lanky man was casual and cheerful; but Tom noted that when he looked at Hill his eyes were not entirely filled with dog-like devotion. The other men were about the same. The leader's manner explained it. Power had gone to his head. He never let them forget who was master.

Hill and Tom soon began to inspect the knoll and its rocky ledge. Specimens of rock made the gambler's eyes glitter. He went over the ground almost inch by inch. At length he stood at the base of the knoll.

"She's sure a convenient mine," he asserted. "Look. We don't have to sink no shaft. We'll run a tunnel straight in from here. If we pitch the tunnel down some she'll hit the vein about a hundred feet under the summit. Yes, we'll start the tunnel right here."

Hill's easy assumption of ownership opened Tom's eyes.

"Aren't you a little previous?" he challenged.

"As how?"

"You don't seem to have any doubts about sharing the mine."

Hill replied slowly. His armed men were all about.

"No. I ain't got many doubts. That thing will work itself out, all right."

And Hill confidently resumed looking at the claim.

Tom wondered why Hill didn't try to eliminate him entirely and "split" with the gang; but the answer was apparent. Hill preferred to divide with Tom and Pete. They were only two. There was more in it for Hill.

Tom had no further illusions about the man. He was without honor, candor, generosity or mercy. Tom noted that the other men looked on Hill the same way; but they were frankly afraid of him, in spite of their toughness.

They were tough all right, though some were milder than others, and perhaps went into the bandit business because it meant a living. Their claims were as picturesque as the owners. Badly penciled signs announced the titles, such as "Tennessee," "Fat Mary," "Mike Jones," "Blond Susie," "Dirty Steve" or "Four Aces."

One was even named for a national celebrity. It was called the "Boy Orator."

Next day Tom returned to Escalante and killed time waiting for news from Pete. He avoided Hill as much as possible.

Pete's letter arrived; and when the two sharp-faced mining engineers came Tom led them to the mine. Hill was away. Hill's crowd was curious but not aggressive, and Tom gave no explanations. While the experts were examining the rock he chatted with the crowd.

"Why don't you fellows file your claims at the Land Office and make 'em regular?"

he asked the lank, cheerful citizen known as Tennessee.

The other laughed somewhat harshly.

"What's the use?"

"This country may be civilized some day. Then you'll have legal possession. Things can't be like this forever, can they?"

"I dunno. It looks like they'll last a long time."

"Well, conditions have to change some time, haven't they?"

The other scratched his head.

"Mebbe there's somethin' in it. I dunno. Tell the other fellers. Hey, Bill—Jim—Hank—come here!"

Several well-armed ruffians in checked shirts and overalls sauntered up, and Tom repeated his talk. The men looked thoughtful.

They were in a horrible plight. They were fed, but that was all. Ill-clad, penniless, dispirited, with no joy in the past, no outlook for the future and no funds to get out of the country, they were likely to cling to these claims desperately because the claims were their only hope.

They listened to Tom because he suggested a tighter hold on the properties. Legal methods hadn't been thought of.

"Think it over," advised Tom. "Form a sort of a mine-owners' association. Let each man file on his claim while the others protect it. Make it a community proposition."

The crowd blinked thoughtfully.

"But how about Red?" asked Tennessee. "He's sore. He ain't got no claim."

"Well, make him secretary or something. Offer him a percentage of profits. Why have him fight against you when he can fight for you?"

"Red can't write."

"Oh, well, give him the job and let somebody else do the work."

Tom said it half-jokingly, but the crowd seemed impressed.

THE two mining experts from San Francisco were about through. They were hired to make only a cursory investigation anyhow. The men speeded back to Escalante with Tom, raving about the mine.

This fast examination, even by experts, proved that they were sent by a gambling promoter whose methods were casual and very speedy. But though Tom sensed this he was in no position to look the gift horse in the mouth. He wanted action.

The quickest action came from Jed Hill.

"What's this I hear about a mine-owners' association?" asked Hill, stopping Tom at the Escalante post-office.

"It's true."

"Well, I don't like people monkeyin' with my men. Two or three of those darned fools have filed on their claims already."

"Well, what of it?"

"I'll tell you what of it. Some fellers have been gettin' too independent lately. I hear it from every side. Then you come along and put new notions in their heads. I can't afford it, see? You keep hands off or you and me's goin' to have trouble."

And Hill turned on his heel and strode away.

Tom started straight back to his claim. He saw that his position was almost untenable, but he couldn't let go. His job was to hold the mine. If he could forestall opposition from Hill's gang up there he had a fighting chance. He made his plans accordingly.

Some one fired at him from ambush during his journey; but after an inconclusive argument he arrived safely at the mine.

"You're lucky," remarked Tennessee. "Finley's whole gang's out. All except Finley. They're tryin' to block the roads. Shot an Injun prospector yesterday."

"What do they expect to gain by that?"

"Mebbe they figger we won't get supplies bimeby."

"Well, we'll let Finley go for a while. I've something more important to say."

Tom looked about the motley, half-ragged crowd. "If some one came along and offered you decent jobs what would you do?"

The lank Tennessee smiled whimsically.

"I used to believe in Santy Claus but not very long. The chimleys was all too narrow. It couldn't be done."

"No? Well, suppose I represented a big mining-corporation that was coming down here to work this property. Then what?"

There was a long silence. The munching of a horse could be heard insistently from a near-by corral.

"Is that true?" challenged Tennessee at length.

"No. Not yet. They're working on the

matter now in San Francisco. Suppose it happens. Then what?"

"Gosh!" exploded Tennessee.

"It's up to you fellows," asserted Tom. "If I win out everybody wins. If this claim is worked your claims become valuable. There'll be jobs open. Think it over."

They thought it over.

An enormous red-headed, red-shirted hulk pushed through the others and leaned his unlovely face toward Tom's. It was the secretary of the association.

"Wadda you want us to do?"

"Nothing. Just keep the association going and hold the claims."

"All right. I'm with ye. T'ell with Jed Hill. The quicker we bust with him the better."

Tom hadn't anticipated that. To have a crowd of ruffians fall on his neck and call him leader was beyond his wildest aspirations.

"No," he countermanded. "That's not necessary. Just go about your business and give me a chance to work this out."

"You'd better work quick, then," roared Big Red. "Jed Hill's got too or'nary. We can't stand him much longer."

"I'm working," promised Tom.

Satisfied that the men would not oppose him though somewhat dazed by their sudden stampede in his favor, he started for town. Tennessee went with him for a short distance.

"Make good," pleaded the lanky sinner. "I want a job."

The spectacle of a professional hold-up man so reduced that he longed for decent work made Tom gulp.

IN TOWN Tom came across Mike, the prospector who had first suggested incorporating. Certain stock in the big mine had been apportioned to him from the shares of Tom and Pete. The old fellow was electrified. He made another strong ally.

Tom then went to the county seat. He wanted to meet the sheriff.

The young mine-owner had often wondered why this official was not more active. When he spoke with the drawling, leather-faced old pioneer he found out.

"I ain't a regiment, and this yere county can't support one. She's poor. There's no property except a few little ranches and some mines that ain't workin'. Taxes is hard to scrape up. I've got two deputies and a lot of pris'ners. The pris'ners eat hearty. If I git more deputies or more pris'ners the county goes broke."

"Don't you get a posse together sometimes after a crime?"

"Not often. Costs too much to feed 'em."

Tom began to understand much. He learned that the sheriff was still working on a crime six months old. The sheriff was forty-five cases in arrears, with more coming in daily. His job was hopeless.

The sheriff made an offer to Tom during their talk.

"If you or any other feller wants to wear a deputy's star and won't ask pay for it, it's all right with me. The more men I get the quicker things'll quiet down."

That was what Tom was preparing for. He made tentative arrangements for the future in case he had to fight for his mine. He wanted to be lawful rather than lawless. He was looking ahead.

Tom returned to Escalante late in the evening, while jangling music was pouring from various dives. Tom gave attention to his horse and ambled into the big dance-hall.

Jed Hill was standing at the bar. He spied Tom and beckoned him into the side-room. Hill was wrathful.

"I hear you've been monkeyin' with my men again."

"Yes? What have I done now?"

"I dunno what you've done."

Tom smiled tiredly.

"Well, then why look for trouble?"

Hill's eyes were steely.

"Yeh? Mebbe you think it's a joke. It ain't. I thought mebbe you'd savvy things, but it seems you can't learn. All right. Now I've got somethin' to say to you."

"All right. What is it?"

"You've got jest five days to leave town."

VI

NEWS of the offer of Markum, the promoter, came to Tom at the post-office next day. Tom accepted quickly. He would have jumped at any legitimate proposition. His situation was becoming precarious.

Hill's ultimatum called for quick action. Tom had defied him. It was now a showdown.

Tom saddled a horse and swung into the desert. He had refused to lead the mine-owners' association, but now he had to do it. It was his one chance.

Arriving in camp, he waved Pete's letter.

"Boys, it's come. San Francisco capital has taken hold of this mine."

There was a loud yell, but Tom held up a hand.

"It's a case of fighting. Jed Hill has told me to get out of the country. I'm not going. I'll stay here and build it up. It may be a fight to a finish. You can get into it or stay neutral. Think it over."

The crowd considered. Faced with reality, they became cautious. Finally a black-bearded ruffian spoke.

"What have you got to offer? Money? Grub? Outfits? Hosses?"

"Nothing but a million-dollar corporation."

"How soon can she come down here?"

"I don't know. It may be a month, may be a year."

"That's takin' a large chance."

"It is. It's a gamble."

"And you're aimin' to tackle Jed Hill, mebbe?"

"I am."

Big Red horned in.

"Then I'm for it!"

"I'm not so sure," replied the bearded man. "This feller's right. It's a gamble."

"Then I'll gamble."

Tennessee interrupted, addressing Tom.

"How about Johnny Finley's gang blockin' the roads?"

"We'll see about that later. One war at a time."

The men wrangled till dusk, but Red and Tennessee finally swayed them. They became practically unanimous. Hill's rule had been too heavy, and altogether too selfish. They were ready for rebellion.

At dawn the men saddled horses. Mid-afternoon found the dusty cavalcade riding over a rise that looked down upon the little town of Escalante, whose wooden buildings seemed to stick out of the desert like tiny boxes laid in parallel lines along the main street. The riders went down-hill on a winding road where their horses' hoofs threw up a mighty column of yellow-brown dust.

They arrived at the upper end of the main street and turned into it. They trooped up to the big dance-hall, whose porch was fairly well populated with afternoon drinkers.

Jed Hill was among them, sitting on a tilted chair, with his brown-and-white vest unbuttoned. When he recognized Tom his chair came forward with a bang.

It was a tense moment for Tom. Ahead of him was the most dangerous citizen in the county, surrounded by his underlings. Behind Tom were men who backed him on a sporting chance. He did not know just how far to rely on them. Hill might overawe them again.

Hill stood up truculently.

"What's all this? Didn't I tell you fellers to stay up there?"

"You did," responded Tom. "They're not going to stay."

He dismounted. So did his crowd. Hill awaited the next play. Tom strode past the head of his horse and ascended the porch. His crowd lined up on the road behind him.

"This is a showdown," he announced. "These men represent the Jaguar Cañon Mine-Owners' Association. We've come to visit you officially. I've come to visit you personally. Public welfare demands that you get out of the country."

The sheer audacity of it made the onlookers blink.

Hill looked stupefied with amazement. But not for long. He smiled sardonically. Somebody laughed. Another echoed the laughter.

"That's a right smart idea," nodded Hill. "Who's goin' to do it?"

"I am. You gave me five days to leave. I'm giving you five minutes."

"What?"

"You heard it."

They glared eye to eye—the manhandling boss of a tough district and the young Westerner from the colleges. Nobody spoke or moved a muscle.

Gradually Hill's brow wrinkled. He just looked puzzled.

Tom spoke in a slow, monotonous voice that did not change an inflection.

"You have put this country into a hole. You have milked the land dry. You are preventing decent people from coming in. You are standing in the way of every enterprise except gambling, booze and robbery. As long as you stay there will never be any improvement.

"It is time you were going. You have two minutes to start."

A querulous voice arose from the sidelines.

"Gosh—the young feller's crazy!"

Tom did not move a muscle. He spoke again to Hill in that low, murmuring voice without changing a tone.

"My partner's friends in San Francisco are backing us with a big mining-corporation. They are coming down here to help set the country on its feet and they'll bring in new money and new men. You are playing a losing game, and— Up!"

In Tom's right hand was a six-shooter.

HILL was too late. The slow, soothing voice had deadened his action. The younger man's hand had whipped downward like lightning. Tom had beaten an expert at the draw.

Hill's hands slowly elevated from his hips. His face expressed plain amazement. The unbelievable had happened. One of his friends moved alongside him, but somebody behind Tom brought down the barrel of a rifle. Every one stood motionless. The very air seemed electric.

"It's a trick," roared Hill. "You caught me off my guard."

"I had to. I'm no gunman."

"No? Well, you'd better be."

Tom stepped forward and stripped off Hill's cartridge-belt with its pendant six-shooter. The big gambler's eyes were pinpoints. Tom felt for more weapons and found none. Then he stepped back.

He knew that twoscore calculating men were watching him. He had won by a ruse, but that proved nothing to this crowd. They had to be shown.

Tom deliberately sheathed his gun, unslung his cartridge-belt and tossed the whole business behind him.

The startled crowd murmured. Here was something new.

"Time's up," announced Tom. "I told you to get out of town. Now you'd better start."

Hill turned to a couple of men alongside him.

"Get him," he commanded.

Tennessee came up the porch with a pistol in his hand.

"Fair play," he bellowed. "You fellers keep off."

On the road Big Red jerked the lever of his Winchester. The metallic sound had a quieting effect. Hill's men stood undecided. Hill sneered.

"You fellers are fine friends! I've got half a mind to go. Then what'll happen to you, hey? If I ain't here to feed you, half you —— fools'll starve to death."

It was true enough to start a murmuring in the crowd; but no one cared to begin a battle. Tom reached out an arm and clutched Hill's shoulder.

"Take my advice. Start."

Again Hill's ferocious eyes showed a surprized look. Then he leaped. He swung a vicious fist in a wide arc. He lashed out again. He meant to punish, smash, annihilate.

Tom guarded and hit him straight between the eyes.

Amazement—sheer, blank amazement—was on Hill's stupefied face as he staggered back against the doorway. His world was reeling. He had held sway over rough crowds of gamblers, robbers, cattle-rustlers and all-round bad-men; and now a young fellow from nowhere was calmly tipping him over! It was unbelievable!

"Gimme a gun," he gasped. "For ——'s sake, gimme a gun."

"You'll get no gun."

Hill's face contorted diabolically.

"I'll kill you!" he snarled with an epithet.

It was Tom's turn for anger. He lashed out with all his strength. His right fist smashed into Hill's face. The impact knocked the big gambler into the doorway again.

Then he recovered. Yelling like a wildcat he rushed at Tom, flailing arms savagely.

Tom sidestepped and struck again. He was the master at clean fighting, but he forgot something. The trained athlete observes the rules instinctively. There were no rules here.

Cornered, stripped of weapons and power in front of the men he had ruled, Hill was dangerous as a tiger. He breathed like a man drunk. Drunk with rage. He rushed like a bull, hardly feeling the powerful blows that flailed upon him. Tom avoided him. He charged again savagely.

The other men had left the porch, some jumping.

Again Hill charged like a mad bull. Tom avoided him and struck. Hill seemed to fall on Tom's shoulder. A hand like a steel vise grasped Tom's throat. He tried to back away but another hand reinforced the first.

A queer sensation came over Tom. His brain numbed. Then he clenched his teeth. With a mighty heave of his arms he tried to pull those clutching fingers away. He couldn't.

His breath shortened. He felt his strength leaving. And this man was trying to throttle him! Longing to kill him!

Savagely, desperately, Tom swung a hammering fist at Hill's bluish jaw. The big gambler staggered but hung on. Tom smashed again. The fingers relaxed. Tom gathered his last strength and swung a paralyzing fist. It struck squarely.

The terrible fingers lost their grip. Hill's battered head drooped forward and his knees doubled under him. He tumbled to the ground and lay still.

Tom, gasping for air, swayed drunkenly on the porch while the crowd seemed to revolve in bilious circles before his eyes. He put hands to his throat. Deep indents were still in the flesh and he rubbed them.

His mind began to clear. He stumbled over Hill and looked at him. The big gambler was quivering back to consciousness.

"Bring him some water," choked Tom.

FOR the first time he noted that the crowd had grown enormously, reaching almost across the street. Tom felt like an actor on the stage. Even the bearded doctor was in the audience, and the dance-hall girls.

Puzzled and speculative faces looked at Tom from all sides. The episode had come swiftly. The men wondered what it meant for them. Their world had changed.

Tom resolved to give them no chance to organize against him. He had dethroned a leader and he must take the leader's place, otherwise there would be anarchy. That minute he saw his future task. It was a large contract.

Hill was recovering. Tom turned to him. "Are you ready to start?"

The big gambler looked over the crowd somberly. No one had struck a blow for him. If he were some roistering Robin Hood or Dick Turpin things might have been different, but with him everything had been cold cash business.

"Yeh. I'm ready to go," he growled at length. "Then we'll see what becomes of this bunch. Lemme inside. I want to git my money."

"Come ahead."

Tom was suspicious. Hill accepted defeat too easily. But the big gambler made no false move.

"You needn't be skeered," he grunted. "You couldn't hire me to stay here. I've seen enough of 'em. We'll see how they get along without me."

Hill stuffed money into his pockets and filled a satchel. Tom didn't like the idea, but he couldn't rob Hill; so the big gambler got away with it. He started down-country, disappearing in a cloud of dust.

The big gambler had hinted at the truth. He'd let the district suffer for a while without him!

Tom had become responsible for the future of the country. He began to see the stately job he had taken. His crowd still further impressed it upon him.

"Well, you did it, young feller," said the bearded citizen. "Now the rest of it's up to you."

Tom accepted the challenge. In two days he organized the town's better citizens. In two weeks they held an election. A town government came into being. Big Red was made constable.

Tom had prestige, won by beating Hill. It held down the opposition; but the rougher element formed the majority and began to reassert itself. Fights started.

Newspapers from San Francisco saved the situation.

Spread on their inside pages were flamboyant advertisements of the Escalante Bonanza Mining-Company, with pictures of money-bags all over the borders. The advertisements were printed in the days before California's corporation laws were well developed, and the sky was the limit. Modesty and conservative statements were rigidly suppressed. Adjectives were fairly spattered over the page.

Never was there such a glittering gold-mine as this. Never was such a chance offered the public. Fabulous riches awaited the lucky investor. Didn't the famed Comstock give thousands to a man who put in a few paltry hundreds? Aren't there millions of dollars taken from gold-mines every year?

Invest now! A person has to grasp opportunity by the forelock. Put your name and address on the dotted line. Send for literature. Do it *now!*

Underneath this violent outburst was the name of Peter J. Dolliver, President.

The advertisement was a life-saver to Tom. It stifled opposition and gave the new public officials a chance to work. Things quieted down. Tom was finally able to start on a little expedition after Finley. He got a deputy sheriff's star and pottered about the hills, finding nothing except some cold trails. The Finley crowd had vanished.

The next crisis came from the mine-owners' association, which grew restless. Tennessee put it bluntly:

"When's that company comin'? Grub's scarce and we're all broke."

Tom went to the county seat, got credit and established a small community store at the mines. Everything was on credit. It meant still another gamble. Tom's eyes were getting haggard.

After a time he noted that no word had come from Pete. He wrote again and again. No reply came. Thoroughly worried, he happened to pick up a newspaper.

There was the usual shrieking advertisement of the mine, giving notice that only a few shares were now for sale. At the bottom of the screed was a new name. Oliver J. Metz, President.

Tom felt his spine tingle. He read it again. The page seemed to blur. Where was Pete? Why was his name missing? Had he resigned? Was he kicked out? What had happened?

The stage down-country was just turning a corner on its way for the main road. Tom jumped for it. Doubt, suspicion and anxiety assailed him. Without a coat, without baggage, without explanation to any one, he leaped on the rear end of the stage and swung up to a seat.

Fifty hours later he was on a train. Next morning he was in the city.

* * *

TOM went straight to headquarters. In a short time he stood before Markum in the elegant office.

"I'm Tom Hall," he announced. "Pete Dolliver's partner. I just came up to see what's going on with our mine."

Markum looked at him through heavy-lidded eyes. He appeared to be racking his brain.

"Dolliver. Dolliver. Oh, yes. That's the old fellow who sold us the Escalante mine."

"Sold you the mine? What are you talking about?"

"Sure he sold me the mine."

"Outright?"

"Certainly."

"You lie!"

"I do, hey?"

Markum opened a drawer, wet his thumb and flicked a packet of papers. He pulled an oblong bit from the rest.

"Read that," he demanded.

Tom read. The room seemed to whirl around him. The writing was plain. It seemed to leap like a snake from ambush—

> Received of Hiram K. Markum, Five Hundred Dollars in full payment for the Jessica mine at Escalante, also known as the Escalante Bonanza mine.

It was signed by Peter J. Dolliver in his crabbed handwriting.

Pinned to it was Tom's authorization, allowing Pete to sign for him.

VII

THE hospital whither Pete was taken was a horror. Cheap politics, ancient equipment and public indifference evolved an institutional nightmare. In the flimsy, hastily constructed buildings politicians, cockroaches, sick, dying, bad food, evil smells, foul language, poor ventilation, scanty equipment, discouraged nurses and hardened stewards combined to make a hopeless total. This was the place where fate had sent Pete.

Tom strode into the ramshackle old hospital soon after leaving Markum. He had learned Pete's whereabouts from the lodging-house landlady.

The old prospector was weak and wan. His cot was in the middle of a row of human derelicts. Over his prominent cheek-bones the skin was tight-drawn, while lustrous, deep-set eyes told of a battle with fever. Tom was staggered by the change in his partner.

His own anguish gave way to pity. He saw the glad look in the old desert-rat's face at sight of him and could not spoil it. He tried to be cheerful. Soon he realized that Pete should have been almost well by now; but—this was the old hospital.

"I feel sorter blue," admitted Pete.

"I know why. You'll get out of here if it takes my last cent."

Tom grimly remembered that he had only about a hundred dollars to his name. But he would manage somehow. He had to!

"By the way," he asked casually, "did Markum give you five hundred dollars for something?"

"Yes. I borried it."

Pete pondered a moment.

"Mebbe I shouldn't have done it?"

"Oh, that was all right. Did you give him anything in return?"

"Lemme see. I'm tired. Um. I signed a receipt. Why?"

"Oh, nothing. We were just arguing about who the receipt belonged to."

"Belongs to?"

Pete raised himself weakly on the pillow.

"Why, she belongs to Markum. He wrote in his name. Then he handed me his pen and I signed too. Why?"

"It didn't say what the five hundred was for?"

"Sure not. 'Twarn't nobody's business, was it? Why—what's the matter?"

"Oh, Markum gets his accounts mixed up. It's unbusiness-like. Makes a lot of trouble. I've worried about that fool receipt for two hours because I was wondering what the five hundred was for. Markum couldn't remember correctly. Now I'll straighten things out."

When Tom left his jaw set like a vise. It was cold-blooded robbery, all the worse because hard to prove. Markum had written that stuff about the mine into the receipt after Pete had signed an innocent paper. It was bold, bald, shameless and fatal.

Tom reached Markum's office, seeing red. He hurtled past a clerk who would have detained him. He tore open the door of the private office and bore down on Markum. Then he halted.

Alongside the promoter was a tall, elderly man of erect bearing and perfect afternoon raiment. His poise and his handsome, serious face stamped him as a thinker and a person of assured social position. His brow was high, his intelligent eyes well apart and his well-groomed hair and mustache graying at the edges.

It was Richard Wentworth, Helen's wealthy fiancé.

Tom hesitated; but his ire was too great to stifle. Ignoring Wentworth, he stood over Markum like a tower of wrath. The fat little promoter burrowed into his swivel-chair.

"Markum, you lied to me," thundered Tom. "You lied—lied—lied! If you've got anything to say, say it quick."

"What—what's the matter?"

"You know! You buncoed Pete Dolliver out of his mine!"

The pudgy little promoter had been through this sort of thing before, but he never liked it. It was the one drawback to an otherwise successful and profitable business.

Sometimes women wept on the table and made nasty scenes, but they were comparatively easy. Men generally wanted to fight. The more powerful men sometimes made serious trouble. Tom looked powerful. Markum acted accordingly.

"Here—let's talk this over. There's some mistake. Take a chair and cool down. That's it. Cool down."

"There's no mistake. You're a plain swindler."

Markum took a chance. He noted alarmed clerks running in through the door.

"Prove it."

IT MADE Tom see red again. His powerful arms reached forward and swung Markum out of his chair, whirled him to an open window and hung him out face-downward.

Markum looked five stories to the busy pavement below—and into eternity.

Wentworth grabbed Tom's arm desperately.

"Hall! Stop it! Stop it!"

But Tom ignored him, roaring at the man under his arms.

"Speak up—quick! Did you swindle Dolliver? Say it!"

"Yes!"

"Did you doctor that receipt?"

"Yes! For ——'s sake lemme in!"

"Are you going to make amends?"

"Yes! Anything! Anything! Stop it—stop it!"

People down below started to look upward. Tom shook off the writhing figures alongside him and swung the promoter back into the room.

"Put it in writing!" roared Tom. "Sign it!"

Markum staggered away from the window and got behind a table. Moisture trickled down his face in a steady stream.

"Sign!" ordered Tom.

Markum straightened suddenly.

"I won't! Leggo me! I promised under duress. My life was threatened. Officers, arrest that man."

Coming through the doorway in the wake of an excited clerk who had summoned them were two stalwart men in the blue uniform of the San Francisco police.

Wentworth saved the situation.

"Wait a moment. There's some mistake here. You're excited, Markum."

"But——"

"Calm down. A business misunderstanding doesn't concern the police. You and Hall were both excited. Let the matter lie."

Markum, still pop-eyed, looked rebellious.

"But ——"

"I know. Still, you'd better take my advice."

The owner of the low, cool, level voice seemed to have Markum's immense respect. Markum bowed to money; and this man had stacks of it, with all the influence and power that money begets.

The stout little promoter hesitated. He looked at Tom with venomous eyes. Then he gulped and turned to the patrolmen.

"All right. It's a mistake, boys. Nothin' to it. Cigars? Better take a handful. All right. Good-by!"

There was a strained silence. Tom felt like an ass. His temper had run away from him, and all to no purpose. Helen's fiancé had placed him under obligations. His visit was a total loss.

Tom collected himself and turned to the well-groomed aristocrat who had intervened.

"I owe you my thanks and my apologies, Wentworth. I'll deal with this man some other way. Good day."

"Stop," demanded Wentworth. "What's it all about?"

"It's a protest. A protest against crooked business methods. This man Markum has swindled us out of our Escalante mine."

"Escalante? Why, what is this? I'm a director in that company. I've put up fifty thousand dollars."

"Happy days!" mimicked Tom weakly.

"If you have any charges to make against the Escalante mine, Hall, I'm here to listen."

"Nothing against the mine. The mine's good. It's the promoter."

Tom's brow knit.

"Say, did you fall for the hog-wash in those advertisements? How did *you* come to be in it?"

"A mining engineer spoke of it," said Wentworth, "and then I believe one of Markum's salesmen came. But that's outside the mark. You have made certain charges against a corporation in which I am interested. Substantiate them."

Tom described the changing of the receipt. Markum was voluble in denials. He told a frank story of buying the property from an old miner for five hundred dollars. Such things happened every day, and Wentworth was naturally unable to judge.

"You'd better go to law," he advised Tom finally.

Tom went to an attorney he had known for years. The attorney was sympathetic but dubious.

"It's one man's word against another's," he observed. "There's not a witness except Markum and Pete. I'll take the case if you want me to, but I'm not too sure about winning. Where is the correspondence between yourself and Pete?"

"In Escalante."

"Get it."

"I'll start in a few days. As soon as Pete is better."

Tom then took Pete to a decent hospital where he had a clean, quiet little room. Nothing was said about the tragedy of the mine. Pete was ill. He needed cheerfulness.

Tom needed cheering too; but his job was to give, not receive. Had he overheard a conversation between Markum and Wentworth he might have felt better; but he didn't hear it.

Markum had explained his program:

"Bryan's defeat smashes the free-silver idea and gold's the big idea from now on. Our company's stock is all sold and we're ready to start operations."

Tom had been thinking of his hungry crowd at Escalante, waiting patiently for the mine to come.

WHILE in town Tom had a social duty that could not be avoided. He made for the house on Pacific Avenue; but he feared the ordeal.

It was not so bad as expected. Even

Helen's mother was quite urbane. She was not too warm nor too cold, registering a just appreciation of his feelings as well as a subtle determination that those feelings be suppressed. She chaperoned the session.

She could afford to be gracious. She had won her battle. Arguing, pleading, persuading, finally commanding; wading through a torrent of tears, she had won her battle. It had saddened her; but from her view-point the result was worth the grief.

Stout, exquisitely gowned, gray-haired, keen-eyed, thin-lipped and with face a little hardened with the predatory expression of the social *grande dame*, she found herself making a re-appraisal of Tom and was more than ever convinced that he wouldn't do. He looked so roughened!

Helen mentioned Pete's visit and gave a guarded version of it. Tom was flabbergasted. Helen further informed him that her mother was a small stockholder in the mine.

"We didn't know it was yours, though. We didn't connect it. Mother read an advertisement one day, and then she bought."

"Great Scott!"

"Well, it's all right, isn't it? Now that we know you're in it we feel even better."

Tom let it go at that.

"It must be a wonderful country down in the desert," remarked Helen. "Mr. Dolliver's descriptions gave me a new idea of it."

Wondering just how much damage Pete had done, Tom gave a sketchy outline of the gaunt desert lands around Escalante.

The visit finally neared its end. The mother stayed glued to her chair. It was eminently right and proper, but Tom was human enough to want her elsewhere.

It came by accident. Some delivery person in the rear called for her; and the maid was out. The mother excused herself, first bestowing a sharp glance upon her daughter.

There was a moment of silence. Helen seemed to be contemplating a carved black dragon crawling up a pedestal under a massive vase. Tom watched the delicate lights and shadows on her face.

But time was fleeting. He forced himself to ask a question he hated.

"When will the wedding be?"

"In June."

She hesitated.

"Richard wanted it sooner, but mother will not allow it. She wants me to enjoy all the engagement privileges. It's a continuous parade."

"Don't you like it?"

"Ye-es. Any girl does. But sometimes things seem—seem stuffy."

There was another silence.

"Sometimes I go on the long road down the Peninsula, or on the mountaintop with the twisted oak, or on the trail by the cliff where the ocean rolls in——"

"I know. You should have been an explorer or something. Do you remember the time you chased the rainbow's end, cross-country, till your horse almost gave out?"

"And we found a hornet's nest where the pot of gold ought to be?"

Her eyes were moist as she smiled.

"And you jumped into the ocean? And I dived after you? And you could swim as well as I could?"

"And we walked six miles in wet clothing?"

"Enough!" pleaded Tom. "Let's stop it, Helen. I've been remembering things too much myself."

There was a long pause while she gazed at the floor absently. Then she looked up.

"You seem worried. What's the trouble? Is it the mine?"

"My share of it, yes. I found a hornet's nest where the pot of gold ought to be."

"And is there no gold there?"

"Plenty. Stacks of it. I'm just trying to figure some way to eliminate the hornets."

She appraised him frankly.

"I can see it's been a strain. It shows on your face, Tom. You look more dangerous than you used to. Sterner."

"Had to be."

"And Richard Wentworth is in your company," she said irrelevantly.

"Yes. It's the one saving element to the whole business."

He crossed the splendid rug between them and stood over her.

"I like Wentworth," he blurted. "I'm glad it's a man like that."

"His first wife adored him."

"Probably," winced Tom.

He changed the subject. When Helen's mother returned he was almost relieved. The tension was getting too great.

After he had left Helen was thoughtful.

"Tom's worried. He must be in a terrible struggle. His face is all lined. Oh, I do hope he'll win out."

The mother's lips tightened.

"Yes, he is a very nice young man. Still, he's getting more uncouth than he used to be. He must be associating with some very crude people."

AT THAT moment Tom was on his way to see one of the crude people. This particular barbarian was recovering his health amazingly.

"How do you feel?" was Tom's first question.

"First-rate, only weak. I reckon I'll walk around the room a couple times and call it a day."

Tom gave Pete two more days of happiness and rest. Then he let the blow fall.

Pete was strangely quiet. For two minutes there was silence. When Pete finally spoke his voice rumbled as from his boots.

"I'll blow the top of his head off. Gimme my gun."

"Not that. Think of some other way."

Pete glared at his partner and snarled from set teeth:

"You stand out from under. I'll handle this."

Tom had to head him off. The younger man had learned his lesson.

"Look here. Suppose you shoot Markum. The work at the mine will stop before it begins. Markum's head of the company. Owns half the stock. If he's out of it the company has to reorganize. It takes time. Cool down and think it over."

"What?" roared Pete. "You'd let that crook go free?"

"No. I won't desert my crowd at Escalante, either."

"All right. What do you want to do?"

"Let him alone till the mine's working."

"Then what?"

"I don't know. Lawsuit, maybe."

"Lawsuit, ——!"

"All right. Go ahead and shoot him. Undo all my work at Escalante. Tie up the company. Make my note for provisions worthless. Let our friends starve. Make 'em go back to the hold-up business."

Pete sat on the bed. He clenched and unclenched his gnarled old hands. He looked helpless and hopeless and miserable. The dream of his life had gone glimmering and he blamed himself.

Realization smote him like a club. It shattered his self-reliance. In an instant he was just a tired, dejected old man.

"I reckon you're right, Tom," he quavered. "I give up."

"Don't do that," advised Tom gently. "We're not dead yet, are we?"

"Heh? Mebbe not. Mebbe not. I dunno. How much money you got?"

"Just a few dollars."

"Same here. I'm wonderin' how we're goin' to git along."

"I'm wondering, too. We'll make it somehow. We have to."

"You're goin' back to Escalante in the mornin'?"

"Yes. You follow along as soon as you can."

"Um. All right. I'll see you in the mornin'."

Tom caught the dismissal.

"What are you going to do?"

Pete arose violently.

"I'm a-goin' to take a walk. —— it, I want to walk, walk, walk. These here walls stifle me. I want to git out. I want to think. Let me alone. Lemme have it out with myself."

"All right, Pete. You're not well enough; but it's better to get it out of your system. I'll see you tomorrow. You'll promise to let Markum alone?"

"I give you my word, Tom."

When Tom left, old Pete donned hat and coat, brushed past an interne who tried to stop him, and strode out of the hospital. He was boiling, seething, sizzling. Though it was nearly ten o'clock at night he pounded along the pavement as if goaded by many devils.

He lost track of time and distance. He passed streets where cables rumbled dully in their slots. He crossed a stately lamp-lit avenue and stalked through dark streets. He came to where the ominous surf of the Golden Gate boomed beneath his feet, and the faraway lights of the Marin shore stared at him coldly.

He turned about and swung past rows of poverty-stricken houses, thinking of his own poverty. He strode through the Barbary Coast, immune to its tawdry lures.

He swung up a dark street. Two black forms approached, but he did not notice them. He was befogged by his own dark thoughts. He strode along till a curt voice awakened him.

"PUT yer hands up."

He saw the dull glint of steel on a knife. He was jolted out of his trance. He halted abruptly. Then he acted.

Savage, desperate, wild with self-humiliation, he didn't care what happened. He saw red. He reached back. In a flash he swung out a heavy forty-five and leaped forward to kill.

"Come on," he pleaded. "Come on!"

There was an eager whine to his voice. Too eager. It meant powder-explosions and quick eternity. It paralyzed the men. They expected an easy haul and looked into cold death.

One of them backed against a wall. The other started to edge away.

"Halt!" yelled Pete. "Hands up there! Quick!"

There was no hesitation. Pete was too anxious. The hands shot upward. Pete's free hand grabbed their weapons. A black-jack and a shiny knife went into the gutter.

Pete cursed them viciously in a voice charged with dynamite.

"You'd hold me up, would you? You'd take the last dollar from a busted man, would you? Heh! I'll see about that! Turn around! Both of you! Lemme see what you've got in return!"

He laid the muzzle of his heavy six-shooter against a cringing head. He sought the man's pockets with his free hand and then he examined the other fellow. He was amazed by what he found. They were loaded with money. He had held up successful hold-up men!

Pete was flabbergasted at his good fortune. The ethical side of it hardly struck him at all. To him it was an offering by Fate to compensate somewhat for what he had suffered. Swindled and victimized, angered and desperate, bankrupt and hopeless, he had turned a corner and wrested a prize from unworthy hands. To him it was a life-saver.

Pete's act was piratical. It was all wrong, but for a man of his type and in his condition it was perhaps natural. He was not educated to the finer ethics.

The old sinner had been betrayed, flouted and robbed. He felt a fierce joy in coming back at somebody and thought himself entitled to the profits. His unmoral attitude was not what would be followed by men of better breeding, but it was about what might have been expected from an illiterate old desert-rat under such circumstances.

Some vague inner sense, however, told Pete that Tom would not accept the money if he knew its source. He would even make Pete give it up.

Pete decided that such a catastrophe should never happen, no matter what sort of yarn had to be told. Pete could face Tom with anything but the real story, and brazen it out.

Next morning at the ferry Pete poured eight hundred dollars into Tom's amazed hands. Tom's eyes were blinking.

"What's this? For Heaven's sake, where did you get it?"

"Never mind. I got sixteen hundred dollars. Half's yours."

Tom's eyes narrowed suspiciously.

"Pete, we only had a few dollars last night. Have you been gambling with them?"

Pete grasped eagerly at a chance to tell a truth.

"Yeh," he retorted. "I gambled for everything—and I won."

VIII

IN ESCALANTE matters had gone badly. Tom's sudden disappearance disorganized his friends and heartened the other element. The town government had failed to work smoothly.

Tom took hold again. Though he did nothing in particular his name and his presence stiffened the better element. People will rally around a man they trust, and Tom had won prestige by ousting Hill.

Some of Escalante's tougher citizens joined Finley. Rumors of depredations by the Finley crowd kept trickling into town. Some one fired at Tom from ambush. It awakened him to the encroaching danger and he took action.

Tom first led a crowd of horsemen to the sheriff's office at the county seat, and that delighted official deputized the whole crowd.

"Things can't be any worse up there, and they might be better," he opined. "I'd go myself, only I've got thirty-forty other cases. Good luck."

After the cavalcade left the county seat Tennessee began to chuckle.

"What's the matter?" demanded Tom.

"Oh, I was jest thinkin'. This here's a funny country. The sheriff's tryin' to find who done that hold-up at Cache Springs six months ago; and now he's made me a deputy!"

The posse maneuvered around the country for several days, but the Finley crowd was elusive. Finally Tom gave it up, though he placed a permanent guard on the road to the mines, being assisted by an appropriation from the town government for that purpose.

Wentworth and a party of engineers came into the country within two weeks. Tom assisted them to start to the mines.

"When you go up there," he suggested to Wentworth, "just figure whether a man would sell that place for five hundred dollars."

Wentworth nodded.

"By the way, your friend Markum wants to come down here."

"What?"

"Yes. He'd like to look at the property, but he doesn't dare. He's afraid of you and your partner. He thinks you're quite violent."

Tom gave a direct answer.

"Will it hasten the working of the mine if Markum comes?"

"I think it will. If he likes the property he'll probably want to work double shifts. The man's a glutton for money."

"All right. Tell him I'll not bother him."

"How about your partner?"

"He's the same. Markum's safe till the mine is working."

"Oh. All right. I'll tell him."

Tom made a few polite inquiries about Helen, and then the financier started. When he returned for the homeward trip he was raving about the mine.

"Congratulations! It's a wonder! My friends, the mining experts, say it looks like one of the best properties in the State."

"Worth five hundred dollars?"

"Ah. Yes. You're right. Quite right." Wentworth put a hand on Tom's shoulder.

"Hall, I feel that perhaps a wrong has been done you. I am going to have a long talk with Markum. Perhaps I may persuade him to make restitution."

It made Tom feel better.

OLD PETE sauntered into town a week later with his once splendid store clothes battered, torn and covered with the dust of many miles. He little resembled the debonair Pete who had sallied forth all dressed up to find a promoter. He had found a promoter.

Tom learned that he had walked all the way from San Francisco.

"Sure," explained Pete. "The doctor at the horspittle says I wasn't very strong, so I'd better lie down and rest some more at forty dollars a week. I got me two bottles of Jones' Elixir and lit out. Me and Jonesy done the rest."

"Do you feel perfectly well now?"

"Fit as a fiddle."

Pete told the truth. Though it nearly killed him the long, grueling journey over mountain, valley and plain had finally toughened the old fellow's body till he resembled hickory. He flexed an arm proudly.

"You'll do," admitted Tom. "Now I've got a job for you. How'd you like to be a clerk?"

"A which?"

"A clerk. Stands behind a counter. Sells crackers, sardines, overalls, lard, bacon, kerosene and calico."

"If it wasn't January I'd say the heat had gotten you. Better lemme give you a spunful of Jones."

"I'm not joking. We're storekeepers. You remember I started a little outfit up at the mine? The boys have been running it haphazard, but as soon as the corporation starts work up there we've got to put it on a business basis. The store is our one big hope."

"Me a counter-jumper? Gosh!" Then Pete suddenly looked crafty. "Holy smoke! The store's right up against the mine, ain't it? Right next to where the tunnel's got to be! Goshalmighty! I'd never have thought of it! We can watch everybody that comes to the mine. I'm your counter-jumper. Lemme at it. Gosh, Tom, you're even smarter'n I thought."

Tom gasped. He had merely placed the store-tent under the brow of his hill because that position was most convenient. He began to laugh.

"That's accident. Besides we're not going to fight the company. We're going to help it."

"Yeh. Unless Markum shows up."

"Remember your promise."

"I'm rememberin'. I'm to wait till the mine starts operatin'. I'm rememberin'. The quicker she starts the better I'll like it."

"We'll see. Now about the store. You

run it and I'll stay in Escalante till things cool down in the town."

"All right. Bring on your groceries. When do I start?"

"Tomorrow. Take a wagon. There's no road, but you'll get there."

Pete followed directions, leaving with a four-horse outfit that bumped over virgin trails and labored through plains, sand-hills, valleys and dry-washes. In two days it arrived at the mines, triumphant over everything from crevasses to rattlesnakes.

In Escalante things began to happen quickly.

Two earnest-looking gentlemen in corduroy suits and top boots arrived within a week. They were the superintendent and purchasing-agent of the Escalante Bonanza Mining Company. They went up-country.

In the next week wagons began to roll into Escalante from the railroad, carrying mine-timbers and various heavy supplies. Carpenters drifted in. A clerk and a timekeeper materialized. The wheels of commerce began to furrow roads and trails.

The blacksmith hired a man to help shoe horses and mules. One of the town's stores enlarged, employing idle labor. So did the Chinese restaurant. Soon a rival Chinaman appeared and started business.

Quiet strangers, legitimate prospectors and mining men, trickled in to look over the new field. They seeped in so gradually that the town had hardly noticed their coming. It awoke to find itself full of them. Beds were at a premium.

A wave of optimism took place of Escalante's old helplessness. Men showed it in their demeanors.

Tom looked on the work and saw it was good. He and Pete had worked to some purpose. They had helped others, so their labor was not in vain. As for the mine, Tom's lawyer friend had filed suit in San Francisco.

And then Jed Hill returned.

HE CAME in costly black raiment, carrying a splendid traveling-bag. He looked like a city tourist. Alighting from the stage, he noted the town's improvements and whistled.

Tom met him without enthusiasm.

"Hello. What brings you here?"

Hill drew a kid glove off his right hand languidly. "Why, I've got to look after my interests. I own the stage-line and a couple of freight-teams, don't I?"

"Yes. That's right. I thought you meant your political interests. They're dead."

Hill lighted a big cigar with a gold band around it. His next remark was a startling peace offer.

"I'm agreeable. I don't want to see trouble up here. I've got too much stock in the big mine."

"You what?"

"Why, sure. She was too good to pass up, so I went to San Francisco and bought in. All I could afford."

Hill and Markum! What a combination! Hill continued the conversation.

"I'm figurin' on bein' a director. Markum says he'll help elect me, so mebbe I'll go on the board. I figger it's good business."

Tom pictured the scrupulous Wentworth on a board of directors with Hill. It didn't look right. The whole business was off color. Tom went up to the mines to talk it over with Pete.

The old prospector, arrayed in red shirt and torn overalls, was working with hammer and saw upon the framework of a long, narrow structure at the base of the hill, not twenty yards from where the mine-tunnel was to go. It was the new Hall & Dolliver General Store.

The cañon was transformed. Where once the sunlight gleamed for ages on the dry grass of a lonely yellow hillside, lumber and miscellaneous supplies were stacked in mammoth piles. A donkey-engine loomed blackly against a red granite ledge.

Workmen bustled about, hauling timbers. Down in the cañon their dingy white tents stood in an uneven row. Under the lee of a hill north of the mine, pickets and ropes bounded a great corral, with straw on the ground and horses and mules munching baled hay.

"She's a new city," announced Pete, waving a hammer toward points of interest. "In about two days we'll have this here store up. Then we'll be ready for business. Board floor, board walls and tent top. Bimeby we'll paint a sign."

"Any business yet?"

"Tolerable fair. I'm sellin' off the wagon. The tail-board's the counter. Terbacker, matches, chewin'-gum, dynamite, corn beef, overalls, kerosene, fly-paper and ca'tridges."

"Are the other boys in the association working their claims?"

"Startin' to."

"Heard from the Finley crowd?"

"Nothin' much. One or two strangers have been snoopin' around, but that's about all."

"Did you know Jed Hill was back?"

"No!"

Tom related the happenings of the past few days. Pete's skewered eyes looked profoundly thoughtful. He sucked at his pipe and spoke deliberately.

"If you stick white paint over a leopard he's still a leopard, ain't he? Yeh. Well, Jed Hill's Jed Hill. Always will be. If Hill's in with Markum he's figgerin' somethin'. We'll be right in the middle of it."

"We usually are. I wonder what's coming next?"

The answer came sooner than expected.

Tom was riding with Tennessee toward the county seat on a minor errand two days later. They met the incoming stage, whose approaching dust they had seen for miles across the sage-covered land. When Tom recognized the stage's passengers his jaw dropped with consternation.

Markum and Wentworth, with suitcases piled about them, occupied one of the seats; and behind them was Helen with her mother.

"Happy days!" exclaimed Tom.

His heart leaped at sight of Helen waving to him; but the sheer idiocy of bringing her to this land made him rage. He rode up like a centaur and went close to the wheels. His hat came off as he swung around.

"Helen! What brings you here?"

She was fresh as a daisy in spite of the dust which grayed the bloom of her face. Clad in a brownish tailored thing, she smiled bewitchingly over her little surprize.

"Richard brought me here. I made him."

Tom saluted her observant mother and nodded to Wentworth. Markum he ignored. The promoter chewed on a cigar and looked straight ahead.

Helen's expression was questioning behind the smile.

"You don't seem very glad to see me."

"I'm glad. I'm only wondering."

"We just couldn't hold her back," explained the mother. "After Richard—Mr. Wentworth—returned she was bound to see the place. I'm a little interested in this mine, too, but I can not say there's much to see."

"Richard told such interesting stories," interposed Helen. "I just had to come."

Tom said nothing further. What was the use of spoiling her pleasure? She was here now. It couldn't be helped, so he turned back and rode alongside the stage.

THE CAUGHT Wentworth later on the empty porch of the "best" hotel and gave the financier a lecture.

"You've been down here before. You know what the country is. Why did you allow it?"

"She insisted on coming. Besides, her mother is financially interested, you know."

"Couldn't you stop her?"

Wentworth, clad in rough business clothes —it was before the days of khaki—hesitated and looked at the floor. He was searching for words.

"Hall, I'll be frank with you. Have you ever cared for a woman? Enough to want to give her everything she asked for? Have you ever felt willing to make even the most extreme concessions to bring her a little closer?"

It was a confidence and a confession. Coming from an austere financier like Wentworth, it was remarkable; yet beneath all his dignity he was very human. Pitifully human. And likable. Tom wanted no more confidences. He turned away.

"Yes, I've cared for a woman," he replied gently. "Her name is Helen. I might as well tell you."

"Eh? What?" Wentworth stared.

"Oh, I see. I didn't suspect it," Wentworth continued. "I see. Thought you were just old friends. I didn't know. Well, Hall, it won't make any difference or complications——"

"It's all right, Wentworth. I happen to know that Helen thinks the world of you. I just wanted you to understand my full concern for her safety. We'd better make this trip as quickly as possible."

Markum and Jed Hill also held conference in the back room of a dance-hall; but the text was somewhat different. Hill was trying to turn a more or less honest penny. He worked on Markum's nerves and dangled the country's bad reputation before him.

"Listen. These friends of mine are pretty reckless fellers, Markum. I ain't sure they'll keep quiet unless I give 'em somethin'. Then there's this feller Hall. You may need protection."

"I'm not worried about Hall. His word's good enough. But what are your friends liable to do?"

"Well, suppose something happened to this girl. Suppose you got implicated in some way. Where would you get off? Wentworth has some power in this State, hasn't he?"

"For Heaven's sake, don't let anything happen to her."

"That's what I'm saying."

Hill talked business.

"How much?" Markum asked.

"Oh, about a thousand."

"Say, take the girl."

Hill observed he had overstepped the mark. His argument was wholly fictitious anyhow. It was based on a lot of Wild West stuff aimed only to scare. Hill hadn't seen most of his men for weeks. He finally accepted three hundred dollars.

The big gambler was most affable all the way up to the mines. Never was a more pleasant traveling-companion, so agreeable to the men and so gallant to the women.

Helen's mother, enthroned on a buckboard driven by the awed Tennessee, frankly looked on Hill as the one saving element to a boresome expedition. She voiced her opinion during one of the frequent halts.

"He has a wonderful personality. So vivid. If this country owned more men like that it would be more interesting."

Wentworth looked puzzled. Markum looked weary. Tom looked alarmed.

The party traveled slowly and arrived at the mines during the afternoon of the second day. After dinner, while the shadows lengthened in the cañon and the sunlight crept toward the tips of the hills, Wentworth led Helen about the place while her mother accepted the services of Jed Hill in raising a fine new tent brought especially for her use.

Old Pete watched the polite goings-on from the doorway of his store. Finally he exploded.

"What is this? One of them gol-darned lawn-parties? Look at that red-and-white tent. Look at Jed Hill bowin' and scrapin'. Look at the new apron on the Chink cook. Look at them yaps over on the claims, tryin' to look pretty. This here camp's gittin' most too galumpshus."

"Where's Markum?" asked Tom.

Pete pointed up the slope, where the promoter was talking with the superintendent.

"They've jest built a new shanty on top of the hill for the super'ntendent. Two-room shack. Markum's headquarters. I've been watchin' it."

Pete ceased talking. Markum and the superintendent were coming down toward the store.

The fat little promoter came forward confidently, trusting in Tom's pledge. He approached to within easy speaking-distance and looked at the store from its sloping tent top to its rough board walls.

"Did you fellers survey this ground?" he asked at length.

Tom replied. Pete wouldn't.

"No. Why?"

"I was just wonderin'."

"What about?"

Markum hesitated for a moment. He produced a black cigar and lighted it thoughtfully.

"I'm sorry, boys, but business is business. This here store of yours is on company property. I'm afraid you'll have to move."

IX

MARKUM escaped with his life; but he got away because Pete reached for a deadly weapon. Tom saw the glint of steel and turned in a flash. He grabbed Pete's arm.

"Leggo me!" snarled Pete, jerking away savagely.

"Put up that gun."

Pete in his anger tried to shove Tom aside. They wrestled while Markum soared up the hill, cursing his mistake. Pete struck at Tom wildly, trying to knock him away. Tom clinched. Pete loosed a blast of profanity and the partners rolled to the ground amid lurid blasphemy from Pete.

Markum, very red-faced, sailed over the top of the hill and went down into a cañon, crouching behind a friendly rock and mopping his forehead. Over near the store the partners had it out.

"Leggo me!" howled Pete, trying to kick Tom's shins. "Durn ye, git off!"

"Not till you drop that gun."

"Are you goin' to let that crook go again?"

"Can't help it now. He's gone."

"Why in tarnation——"

"Well, figure it out. We need him alive. Wentworth's trying to make him see the light. The courts need his testimony in the lawsuit. A live man can make restitution. A dead one can't. Think it over."

Pete looked upward with saner eyes and untangled his boots from Tom's toehold. Pete nodded a puzzled head.

"Dog-gone it, I've seen cool hands, but you've beat 'em all! Arguin' to a man sociable-like when he's kickin' you in the shins!"

"Well, somebody's got to keep cool around here. What did you draw the gun for? Can't you handle Markum without it?"

Pete arose wordlessly, tossed the pistol to his partner, spat on his hands, and strode up the hill. At the shanty the superintendent argued in vain for ten minutes. Pete wanted gore. He sought it till the last vestige of sunlight had faded from the skies.

By this time Markum was nervously seated in a chatting group in camp-chairs near the new tents, where the party was enjoying the wonderful evening. Jed Hill was in the middle of a splendid reminiscence when the stalwart figure of old Pete loomed beyond the tent-ropes. Markum registered intense interest in the conversation.

Pete stood on one foot and then the other. He couldn't stroll over and knock Markum cold in front of the gentlewomen; so he waited like a silent, gloomy statue of wrath.

Markum fidgeted. Pete wanted action. He had pondered long on a discreet but blistering insult, and at last he found a chance to hurl it.

"Did I ever tell you the story about two fellers I used to know up in the Red Hills?"

"No," chorused the party politely.

"Heh! Well, this here yarn's got a moral to it. Mebbe some of you'll catch it. Here goes:

"A FELLER named Ike Lemmon had a cat. Big lanky mean-lookin' tomcat with yaller eyes and a temper like a buzz-saw. Lemmon figgered the cat could fight because he looked it. He bragged about it.

"A feller named Henry something-or-other took him up. Henry had a fox-terrier. They bet five dollars and let 'em go to it.

"After the terrier had chased the cat across three counties Ike was sore. He didn't like to git beat by anybody anywhere, so he got a bull-pup and sent Henry a challenge. Henry was fool enough to take it up.

"After they'd buried the terrier Henry got real peevish. Henry was stubborn as Ike. He looked around and got one of them ugly fightin' Airedales. The Airedale chewed up the bull-pup in about five seconds and Henry got the money.

"Ike went home and really begun to git interested in the proposition. By now the whole country was backin' Ike and Henry—those fellers in the Red Hills are pretty gamblesome—so Ike had to make good.

"Bimeby he sent Henry a challenge for an animal fight without namin' his critter. Henry was game, so everybody bet a lot of money.

"They put the Airedale in a sort of a pit, and then Ike brought up a heavy wooden box. Out popped the most or'nary-lookin' bobcat you ever saw—jest one snarlin' mess of teeth and claws and red-brown fur.

"That Airedale lasted four seconds by the watch. The bobcat bounced down on his neck and that was all there was to it.

"But Henry jest wouldn't be licked. He went up to San Francisco and looked through the kennels and finally he picked out the most gosh-wallopin' big Dane dog in the city. Big as a calf. E-normous!

"Henry brought the Dane home quiet and asked for a return match with Ike, sight unseen. Ike showed up at the ring expectin' the bobcat to bring home the money.

"After the Dane had stepped on the bobcat and rolled on him a couple times Mr. Bobcat jumped out of the pit, clawed some folks in the dollar reserved seats, and lit out for Mexico or some place.

"That fight made Ike a different man. He took it to heart. He thought and thought and thought, but he couldn't find any way to lick that Dane except with a gun.

"Ike got or'nary and peevish and short-tempered about it. Finally he lit out cross-country, figgerin' to move away.

"In about ten days he came back all excited. Sent a challenge to Henry right away. Henry figgered his Dane was pretty tolerable good so he backed him with all the money he could borry or steal.

"Ladies and gents, I'll give my word that when Ike's critter got into the ring that big Dane—the dog that licked a fightin' wildcat—jest tucked his tail down and shivered and whined to go home. That big first-class dog had struck somethin' that no sane critter ever wants to run up against."

Pete stopped, looking at Markum. Helen voiced her curiosity.

"What sort of an animal was it?"

"A skunk."

Pete felt that the point needed elaboration.

"The less you go near a skunk the happier you'll feel. That sort of critter ain't respectable. If a skunk gits into your house you've got to move out. If one of 'em gits into your mine you've got to git out. You just can't deal with 'em."

THERE was a long and thoughtful silence. It grew intense, even strained. Finally Helen's mother arose.

"If you'll pardon me, I think I'll retire," she said sweetly.

The party broke up.

Later Jed Hill strolled into the store, where Pete and Tom were spreading blankets behind the pine-board counter.

"That was some story you told," observed Hill. "Who was you aimin' at?"

Pete looked dour.

"Got a bad conscience? If the shoe fits, wear it."

"Yeh? Suppose it don't fit?"

"Suit yourself."

Hill looked from Pete to Tom and back again while the lights and shadows from a small kerosene lamp played on his deep-lined face and made it look diabolical.

"I'm liable to suit myself. You two fellers seem to want to tangle with me. I thought we could work together, but it looks like we can't. Mebbe pretty soon we'll have a showdown."

Tom broke in, speaking quietly.

"We had one. Must we have another?"

Wentworth ambled in during the silence.

"It's a beautiful night," he observed. "Wonderful! I never knew a full moon could be so bright. This desert air magnifies things. It's marvelous."

Nobody spoke very quickly; but the financier's arrival took the electricity out of the air and made the other three relax. There was desultory conversation, after which Hill left, though not without an ominous glance.

There was another long silence while the aroma of Wentworth's excellent cigar percolated through the little store-tent and vied with the odors of coffee, cheese and new overalls. The financier brushed the top of a cracker-box and seated himself.

"I had a long talk with Markum. He refuses to budge an inch. He insists that he bought your mine for five hundred dollars."

"He's a liar!" roared Pete.

"Perhaps; but that might be hard to prove. At any rate I'm convinced that Markum's rather an unreliable character. That leaves me only two courses to choose from. I must either force Markum out of the company or get out myself."

"Which will it be?" asked Tom.

"I can't tell yet. I think I'll probably get out."

Tom felt like a general whose last ramparts are crumbling. The mine would merely be the plaything of a crook.

"I'm sorry about this thing," continued Wentworth, "but——"

A woman's scream came from the tents down the cañon. It was an ear-piercing shriek that made the men's hair tingle.

Tom, Pete and Wentworth leaped for the door. Another scream came, louder than the first. The moonlight disclosed two dark prowlers dodging into the shadows behind the foremost of the new guest-tents, where excited cries pierced the air.

The three men scrambled out of the store and rushed across the intervening space. A fourth figure also darted toward the tent. He tore down the hill. He arrived first and bawled something intended to be soothing.

The hysterical voice of Helen's mother came from inside.

"Two men! They came in! Where are they? Who were they?"

Tom, Pete and Wentworth heard it as they drew near. Tom took the lead.

"I feared something like this," he muttered.

The fourth man turned the corner of the foremost tent and dodged into black territory where the moonlight could not reach.

A line of flame burst from the shadows. A vicious report roared. It echoed down the cañon like thunder.

Helen's mother shrieked. Another sharp report interrupted her. Then two figures scuffled out of the darkness and ran uphill.

Tom and Pete reached for weapons. They tore around the corner of the tent. Tom stumbled over something soft. He tripped and fell. A fusillade from Pete's weapon blazed over his head. The two strangers, leaping in zigzags, turned a rock-corner and disappeared.

Tom felt downward and touched the body of a prone man.

"What's this? Who is it?"

Pete went onward, yelling something. The clatter of many running boots told of men arriving hastily. Helen darted from her tent, a flash of white, and rushed to comfort her mother.

A teamster appeared, his galluses flying behind him. Tennessee came up with a six-shooter and no shirt. Others were converging from all quarters.

"Strike a match," ordered Tom.

A light flickered in the palm of a hand. It disclosed the figure of a large man lying face downward, with his knees bent and an arm crossed under his body. His helpless hands lay open. In one of them was the butt of a pistol. Under his forehead the ground was wet with a sinister stain.

* * *

"JED HILL!" exclaimed Tennessee.

"Oh!" came the muffled cry of Helen's mother.

Wentworth took a hand.

"Lift him up. Get water, somebody. Feel under his shirt. His heart may be beating."

Tom felt and shook his head. There was nothing to be done.

Markum arrived and joined the group. When the light of a second match flickered on Jed Hill's forehead the promoter shivered and turned away, trembling.

The shooting puzzled Tom.

"What's it all about? Who were those two men?"

"They didn't belong in this camp," asserted Tennessee. "Everybody's accounted for."

"Then there's only one answer. It's Finley or his gang."

Tom arose.

"Boys, watch those hills. Post guards. Tennessee, look after the store till I get back. They may try to raid the supplies. Jim, trail after Pete. He's up the ridge."

The men departed and soon the camp began to collect itself. The outcry gradually lessened. Hill was taken to a tent and the men not on guard went back to their beds.

Tom and Wentworth sought admittance to the tent of Helen's mother and were finally allowed inside. Under the ministrations of Helen her mother's haughty calm was reasserting itself. Lying on an improvised bed, she fought for control of her startled nerves while her thin lips tightened in self-repression.

"And Mr. Hill was—was shot?" she asked.

"Yes."

She hesitated and looked at the ridge-pole.

"He died protecting women! There was a real man!"

It was too much for Tom. His nerves were also on edge and he wanted to get out. The mother had told the whole story anyhow. Two prowlers had walked into the wrong tent. That was all. They had killed Jed Hill while making their escape.

Tom sped up the hill.

"And the villain died a hero's death!" he soliloquized. "Ye gods, what a country!"

The silent rocks with their dark shadows left no trace of Pete, and Tom made way cautiously. It was an eery place on top of these hills, with rock-cairns scattered hither and yon. A black blob might be a shadow or a cavern, so the trailer soon gave up the useless chase. He knew Pete was safe enough. He'd probably gone home, too.

Tom looked down upon the little colony below, with the brilliant moonlight illuminating tents, rocks, gullies and the yellow salt-grass mound where the mine stood. Suddenly his mind was stricken with the helplessness of the camp. Higher hills surrounded it completely. East, west, north and south it was vulnerable to attack at any time. A lone raider with a rifle could do incalculable damage.

"Why didn't I notice it before?" gasped Tom. "Why didn't Finley see it? Maybe he has!"

Finley had to be dealt with. There was no alternative. He must seek and suppress Finley if it took a month. The presence of Helen and her mother made him almost sick with worry. They must not make the return trip till all danger was over.

Tom announced his program next morning, choosing three men to go with him. Helen and her mother did not wish to leave very soon anyway. Their experience had left them shaken.

While Tom was catching his horse in the corral Big Red came through the gray cañon, storming in with a great clatter.

"Hey, Tom!" he bawled. "The fellers sent me to tell you. Finley's up at Jansen's ranch. Got three-four fellers with him."

"Sure of it?"

"We seen him. Three of the boys is watchin' the place. I came for grub and help."

Here was Providence. It fitted with Tom's plans exactly. He fairly itched to be in the saddle.

Jansen's ranch, a lonely 'dobe house abandoned years ago, was twelve miles north. If Finley were there his desperados had killed Jed Hill without a doubt. The ranch was uncomfortably near the mine.

TOM made his decision instantly. He would concentrate his whole crowd on the job. There must be no escape by Finley.

"Get a fresh horse and come with me. Call all the boys. Pete, you and Tennessee and those two teamsters stay here. Watch the rims of the hills day and night."

Tom ran toward the company's cook-tent for a large order of provisions, especially hot food and bread, which he could not supply from his own store. It was not a time to stand on ceremony. The Chinese cook was soon busy on large packages of provender.

Helen came in, looking wan. As she stood in a corner of the big tent her eyes held a peculiar look which Tom could not fathom; but she kept out of his way, merely watching until his business was almost completed. Then she broke the silence. Her voice was a little wistful.

"You're all business these days, Tom. Is this the way you leave us?"

"I want to make time and come back sooner."

"We might leave before you return."

"Not till the way is clear."

Her lips trembled slightly.

"And is the way clear for you? Are you sure of your own safety? Oh, Tom, are there no officers to keep the peace in this awful land?"

"Yes, but they're far away. The danger's immediate."

"I'd hate to see you hurt."

He gulped. Old impulses were stirring, making him struggle to keep them under control. He looked at the bent back of the Chinaman pulling fresh-baked bread out of a ground-oven. When he spoke his voice was constrained.

"I like to hear you say that. Thanks awfully. I appreciate it."

His forced attempt at formality made the ghost of a smile flicker on Helen's face; but it was gone in an instant, and she looked worried. Tom swung a gunny-sack full of provender to his back and started for the entrance.

"I'll be back soon. Don't worry about me."

"Tom!"

He halted wonderingly.

"What's the matter?"

"Is—is that all you have to say?"

He stared into her eyes. Then he tried to formulate some fitting reply with exactly the right shade of meaning, but nothing brilliant came to his mind.

"I—I've held aloof and kept my mouth shut," he blurted.

He realized that this sounded somewhat too brusk, so he made amends, speaking very gently.

"The days of the rainbow are far away. Now I'm in a land without any. No matter how I'm parched my job is to keep silent, and so— Well, I'm keeping silent."

"But the memory of the rainbow never fades."

The bag of provisions thumped to the ground. Tom felt his self-control sweeping away. His voice seemed to crackle with electric tension.

"Do you want me to remember them too well? Shall I let go of myself? Shall I defy breeding, appearances, the rights of an honest gentleman—everything—as I want to do?"

He tossed a chair aside and advanced upon her.

"Say the word! I've held my peace! I've kept away! Now say the word!"

He grabbed her arm, more savagely than he knew.

"Shall I stop being a wooden man? Shall I follow my own inclinations? Say the word, Helen—I'm waiting! Speak!"

Startled, alarmed and thrilled, she did not resist; but after a moment her lips tightened and her flushed face pleaded for his mercy.

"No!" she gasped.

Tom released the pressure of his hand and took a step backward. It was automatic. His face lost its flush though he still trembled. Her plea had been honored as she knew it would be. She knew her man.

"I guess you're right," he muttered. "I'm only making a fool of myself. I shouldn't."

The old smile broke over his face, and he held out a hand.

"Good-by, little friend!"

She gave her hand and smiled also, though her eyes were moist.

Tom turned and strode out of the tent with the mashed provisions on his shoulder. In a short time his cavalcade started. In a minute more the riders turned out of sight in a bend of the gray cañon, leaving only a lazy cloud of dust to tell that they had ever existed.

THE little camp became lonely. Its members went about silently or talked in low tones, for tragedy had thrown them together. Even Markum went about as he pleased, unhampered by the dour Pete. The presence of the still body of Jed Hill, now lying under a tarpaulin in the superintendent's shanty, dwarfed lesser matters and made them unimportant.

But old Pete was cogitating.

Crooning profane songs while pottering about the store, Pete pondered over the recent past, especially Markum's end of it. The more he thought the angrier he grew.

Once at his mother's knee in the distant days of his mountaineer childhood he had heard the Biblical lesson about turning the other cheek to his enemies; but it didn't stick. Now that Tom's restraining influence was gone Pete's unholy desires gained headway. Toward sundown he came to certain conclusions.

"Tom's a leetle too durned legal. It's all right to dicker with a regular gent that way, but when you're dealin' with a rattlesnake hit it with a rock."

By dusk Pete had evolved a complete program. He felt responsible for losing the mine, and he ached to redeem himself. By now the matter had simplified to two equations: Pete and Markum. That made it easier.

With his mind at rest Pete strode up the hill toward the superintendent's office, where a light came through a crack in the open door. He edged into the doorway. The superintendent was away.

Markum, ignoring the grim presence behind the closed door of the other room, was poring over some papers on an improvised desk, with the light of a kerosene lamp throwing his grotesque black shadow along a rough board wall.

He had taken some of his San Francisco memoranda with him to this place, losing not a day's time. Pete watched as paper after paper was noted by the keen eye of a thorough business man. Then Pete grunted.

Markum jumped like a cat.

He looked about and his mouth opened. He clutched his papers convulsively. But the quick pallor on his face receded. He remembered his pledge of safety and spoke in a voice intended to be brisk and businesslike.

"What do you want?"

Pete swung through the door, closing it by a motion of his hip where the butt of a wicked forty-five protruded. Markum's eyes widened, but Pete appeared quite amiable.

"Mr. Markum, when might you say a minin'-company is started workin'?"

"Why? What do you mean? This mine?"

"Any mine. When does it begin operations official? When lumber and supplies arrive?"

"Why—er—I don't understand your question. A company begins operations when it has the money to go ahead."

"And when she goes ahead you might say she was on her way?"

"You might say that. Yes. Why?"

Pete looked at the floor.

"I'm an old man, Mr. Markum. Sorter old and tired. I ain't so crazy to live as I used to be. I'm ready to leave any old time.

"Take hangin', for instance. The average man's skeered of it, but me—if it was worth my while I'd hang in a minute."

Markum felt a somber terror crawling over him, but he fought to control it.

"What's this all about?"

The promoter tried to rise. Pete shoved him back into the chair.

"Wait a minute. Listen to me."

The old frontiersman fished into his pocket and produced a cartridge with a wicked gash cut deep into its lead bullet. It was a hideous thing.

"That's the kind I use. When one of them things hits a man he don't come back."

Markum clutched the corners of the table. Perspiration started from his forehead.

"Put it down. Put it away. You can't break your promise. Put it down."

"Promise? What promise?"

"Why—why— Wentworth told me. Hall told me. They said you'd promised—you gave your word——"

"Yeh. Did you hear the rest of it?"

"What rest?"

"You were safe—absolute—till the mine started."

Pete chuckled grimly.

"The mine was started when she was financed and when the timbers came in. You said so yourself."

Markum's face became livid.

"It's a trap! A trap!"

"Yeh. I was trapped in San Francisco once. Now it's your turn. Look here!"

Pete pulled out the heavy revolver at his side and snapped the chambers out of alinement for loading. He thrust the ferocious cartridge into an empty breech and closed the pistol. Then his thumb pulled on the hammer.

The hammer sprang back with an ominous click. To Markum it sounded like the click of the Gates.

"Now!" said Pete.

He caught Markum by the ear and jammed the black pistol-muzzle against his nostrils. Pete's voice was frigid and very level.

"You're smart, Mr. Markum. You're so —— smart that most of you's goin' through that wall to join Jed Hill.

"I ain't goin' to swap words with you, Mr. Markum. You're too smart for me. Jest hold that table tight and sniff through your nose."

It was pure ferocity. Its results were surprizingly sudden.

Markum's face turned purple-blue. The sparse hair on his head crinkled with sheer horror. He slumped to his knees from weakness. Pete pulled at his ear savagely but couldn't straighten him.

"Let me go!" came the man's hoarse whisper. "Anything! Anything! Lemme go!"

He collapsed and placed imploring arms around Pete's dusty boots. It was the wreck of a man, drooling to himself on the floor. He was scared into temporary paralysis.

A high-tension, high-pressure business man of self-indulgent tendencies had received an ice-water shock. His nerve was shattered. It was not dramatic. It was pitiful, horrible, ludicrous. Pete tried to kick him but couldn't swing a foot back.

"Git up," roared Pete irritably. "Take your medicine."

"No! No! No! No! No!"

Pete reached down and pulled him upward, tossing him on the desk like a barley-sack. Reaching back, the old desert-rat produced a bottle of Jones' Infallible Elixir of Life and Health and held it to Markum's gurgling lips.

To the stupefied Markum the bottle felt like the pistol-muzzle. He screamed and spluttered.

"Don't! My ——, stop it! Stop it! Wugh! You can have the mine—anything—lemme go!"

"Heh! You can't fool with me. You renigged on Tom Hall once. Remember? Yeh? Well, you don't renig on a forty-five bullet."

"Black and white! I'll sign! Black and white! Oh——"

"Yeh. Then you'll wiggle out of it. Come! Quit talkin'. Put your head up."

"I'll confess!" shrieked Markum. "—— man—it's murder!"

PETE appraised him. The man was on the verge of apoplexy. But would he make good his promises if allowed to go? Pete thought so. No human being would care for such an ordeal again.

But Pete wanted to take no chances. He had taken enough in the past.

"Will you tell Wentworth and them others that you done us out of our mine? Will you sign it in public? Will you stand by it in San Francisco? Hey?"

Markum's popping eyes showed a faint gleam of calculation; but he noted the expression on Pete's somber face and gave up.

"Yes! Anything!"

"Yeh. You will. But that ain't all.

You're liable to renig on this thing mebbe. You're liable to say you was forced to sign. Well, you won't. From now on you and me is pardners and twin brothers."

Markum managed to straighten a little.

"Wha—what?"

"You heard me. Wherever you go I'll go. I'll carry this here six-shooter. The first crooked move you make I'll blow your head off. I don't care if you're in the middle of all the po-lice in San Francisco. I'll kill you first and then let 'em hang me. Git that? Yeh.

"From now on it's Markum and Dolliver till you make good. Plaster it on your signs. Paint it on your door. Tell your neighbors. I'll stick like a cockleburr."

"That—that won't be necessary."

"No? I'll be the jedge about that. Now you march down to them folks and say your little piece right out in public. Move! Pronto!"

The dinner-call had sounded long before. The camp's small population was finishing the meal at a long table in the big eating-tent. Helen and her mother occupied one end with Wentworth.

Pete arrived with Markum. The old desert-rat's voice arose in clarion tones.

"Ladies and gents, Mr. Markum's been rasslin' with his soul. He's got somethin' to say in public."

He turned to the promoter.

"Speak up."

Wentworth turned curiously. The teamsters at the long table craned their necks. The Chinese cook loitered in the rear. Markum stared at the ground like a culprit. His task was hard, but Pete was harder.

"I cheated Dolliver and Hall."

"What?" exclaimed Wentworth.

"Go on," snapped Pete.

"I cheated Dolliver and Hall out of their mine. Dolliver brought me the proposition and I accepted it. I promised him half the promotion stock or a quarter interest in the mine."

He looked at Pete for an instant, but Pete's expression made him hasten on.

"I got Dolliver to borrow five hundred dollars from me. He signed a receipt. I doctored it. I made it apply for the whole mine. I—I guess that's all."

"All?" gasped Helen.

Wentworth looked from Markum to Pete and back again.

"If this is true, why do you confess it now?"

The promoter jerked a finger toward Pete. Wentworth looked at Pete.

"How?" he demanded sharply.

"Well, Mr. Wentworth, the wicked don't go to heaven, do they? Markum and me have been talkin' religion. He seen that if he didn't do the right thing he was liable to go to hell."

The corners of Wentworth's mouth twitched.

"Are you sure you have honored your pledge concerning Markum's safety?"

"Absolutely," responded the virtuous Pete. "Every single last word of it."

Ten minutes later Markum had signed a document which confessed the theft of the mine and guaranteed restitution. The attitude of the others had changed toward him.

"I guess that's all," said Wentworth quietly. "I'm sorry, Markum."

It meant an end to all relations between Markum and the financier forever. The promoter turned wearily and started up the hill. He still owned some of the mine, but not so much as he expected to.

Helen gasped at a new discovery. She turned to Pete.

"Then you and Tom are wealthy mine-owners."

Helen's mother started to subdue her optimism, but Wentworth laughed.

"If Hall and Dolliver have struggled along this far they can handle the rest of it. I'm glad they're winning out. Perhaps I may be able to get Markum out of it entirely."

"Thanks," said old Pete.

He ached to tell the good news to Tom and relieve his mind of the awful burden of worry. He resolved to start out next day and tell Tom all about it.

But next morning an excited rider galloped in on a sweaty horse, seeking water for empty canteens. The members of the colony gathered around him, shouting questions. He dismounted and answered as fast as he could.

"Yeh. We've got Finley cornered. Caught him and four fellers near the ranch. Give up? Nary a one! Drove 'em into the ranch-house.

"Fight? Sure. All last night. Yeh, they're still at it."

"How's Tom?" questioned Pete.

"Tom? Oh, that's why I came for more water. Tom's shot."

X

THE distant hoof-beats of a cavalcade echoed dimly through the cañon and came to the ears of anxious folk waiting near the tents. It was late afternoon and the sun threw long black shadows almost to the tip of the yellow hill where the mine stood.

When the cavalcade approached and came into view the colony ran to meet them—all except Helen, who was attending her mother. The riders returned like knights from the fray—stern, dusty, grimy, solemn and utterly business-like.

Old Pete came into view, a scarecrow on a splendid roan horse. He had gone to the scene of action during the day. Behind him rode two surly strangers bound for jail, guarded by a trio of tattered citizens with rifles at their hips.

To the rear of these towered Big Red with a bandage over his face, and beside him a gentle horse carried Tom, who was supported from behind by another rider. Several armed ruffians brought up the rear.

Tom's face was white. His head bobbed with the motion of the horse. His eyes were closed. His shirt was gone. About his middle was a series of rough bandages made from clothing, bound together in a patchwork of blue, yellow, white and red.

Wentworth approached Pete anxiously.

"Is he badly hurt?"

"I'm afeared so. He couldn't have rid much further."

The riders proceeded to the big store and shoved its counter aside. Tom's blanket-roll was quickly prepared. They dragged him off his horse and tried to be gentle as they hauled him inside.

Wentworth took a basin of water and started tearing the bandages away. Burly men clustered about him and vaguely tried to help.

"Did Finley do this?" asked Wentworth over his shoulder.

"I don't think so," answered Big Red.

"How did it happen?"

"Oh, Tom caught the gang near the house. Asked 'em to come in and be good. Offered 'em peace. They laughed at him. Finley cussed Tom through a window; then the trouble began. We got behind rocks.

"Towards mornin' three of the gang started to rush out of the place. When the smoke lifted two men was standin' with their hands up and Tom and another feller was down."

"And Finley?"

"He's finished. He was the first to go."

"Good riddance!" snorted Pete.

The men gave attention to Tom again. His wound was just under the left ribs. Wentworth kept at his work with the basin. Soon he looked up. A newcomer was in the room. It was Helen.

Wide-eyed and white of face, she halted at the door. Then she darted forward and knelt beside the prone man while the others made way. Her expression was dazed, frightened and unbelieving when she saw the wound. Her voice was vibrant.

"Tom! Oh, my heart!"

Her arm went under Tom's head convulsively. The men looked at each other. Wentworth stiffened. The lines of his forehead knitted as he glanced up sharply; but soon he was sponging the wound as if nothing had happened.

"Tom!" she pleaded. "Speak to me! Come back! Open your eyes! Oh, Tom dear, why must you be the one to be hurt?"

In one vehement instant she had revealed herself. But she said no more. She held Tom's head and patted his cheek, indifferent to the crowd about her.

Old Pete glanced at the awkward men and nodded toward the door, leading the way himself. Only Wentworth remained, quietly binding the wound with cotton and linen.

IN A few minutes Wentworth went outside. He strolled up to Pete slowly and meditatively, as if he had something on his mind; but he spoke on a different subject entirely.

"You'd better go to San Francisco and get a stock transfer. A mere confession doesn't restore anything. You must get your property in your hand. Then there's no possible chance for a slip. Hire a good lawyer till the transaction's completed."

"I'll have Markum with me, too."

"All right. Stick till you get your stock. After that leave the man alone."

Wentworth looked about the crowd and then he turned and strolled to his tent. Pete looked after him.

"He's sorter absent-minded."

"Yeh," agreed Red. "This here country's full of surprizes, ain't it?"

The physician, summoned by courier, arrived next morning and went to work. The crowd awaited his verdict.

"It's the spleen," he explained. "The bullet went clear through."

"Will he come out all right?"

"In about a month—barring accidents."

Helen and Wentworth held a talk about the same time. They met in the dining-tent.

"I think I understand," he told Helen gently. "I understand. And I would not want to be in the way of your happiness."

"You would never make any woman unhappy, Richard. It's just a case of ——"

"Of what?"

"Of which happiness."

"I know. And youth must be served."

He gazed out of the tent toward the yellow hill, and his face looked somewhat old and seamed and haggard though its fine features were unchanged.

"Perhaps I dreamed foolish dreams but they were good dreams, Helen; and perhaps I'm better for having had them."

He looked at her and his expression was very soft. Then he arose and patted her shoulder.

"I didn't know about Tom. If I had known, then I couldn't have had the dreams, so it's better after all."

Her eyes were kind as she took his hand and pressed it.

Later she was with Tom. He was conscious, and his gaze was clear as he looked at her, though he could not move lest pain rack him again.

She soothed him, stroking his forehead.

"Just take things easy, Tom. Lie still and don't worry. You've worried about things too much."

The old whimsical smile flickered across his face. His voice was a bit weak, but she understood its message.

"Yes. I worried. About the mine. All the time. But about you—no. I knew things would come out all right. I knew!"

THE house on Pacific Avenue was agleam with lights. Music surged through its windows. A long canopy extended through the rose-gardens and across the sidewalk to the curb. Down the street for more than a block were parked the carriages of San Francisco's elect, with uniformed footmen attending the well-matched horses.

The inside of the house was brilliant with flowers and evergreens. Under a stairway just off the gorgeous drawing-room musicians played joyous airs.

In the paneled dining-hall a long table was piled with confections and the remains of a wedding supper. In another room gleamed many handsome objects with cards on them.

It was late. The bride and groom had departed. The mother of the bride, splendidly gowned, rarely gracious, was enjoying one of the great social events of her life.

Richard K. Wentworth, the best man, was chatting with a group of other financiers, talking shop and immune to the hum of conversation. If Wentworth had any feelings at the wedding he did not display them in the slightest degree.

In a remote corner just behind the musicians an elderly and highly uncomfortable gentleman with skewered eyes was trying to be polite to a party of young bloods of both sexes. He had made one or two unconscious social breaks already, and the young bloods were hopefully angling for some more.

The gentleman was Peter J. Dolliver, wealthy but eccentric mine-owner just up from his desert home to attend the wedding.

He had spent the day with barber, manicure and clothier. His hair and beard were slicked and trimmed to the limit.

Around his wrinkled neck was a high collar and a tie perfectly tied by a bridesmaid. His stiff shirt-bosom was white as the whitest. His dress suit was made by the best tailor in San Francisco.

His other appointments were up to the highest sartorial mark, including his glaring white pallbearer's gloves. Still he didn't feel quite at ease.

He had also acquired much champagne. Questions and comments were surging around him. Pete caught some and others he didn't. Finally he heard a young gentleman at his left finish a few remarks.

"Yes. Tom Hall's certainly one of the luckiest men in town."

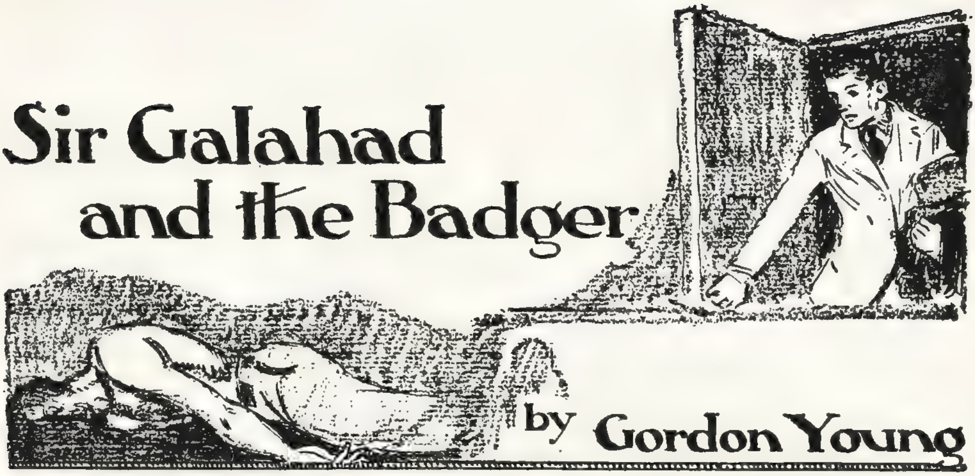
Pete snorted.

"You're a leetle off, friend. He ain't so dog-gone lucky as you think. There's other things besides luck."

"Just what do you mean by that?"

"There's jest two kinds of people in this world, friend: The man who can be licked and the man that can't. Luck may help or hinder, but the man that won't be licked—he's the one that wins out."

Sir Galahad and the Badger



by Gordon Young

Author of "Storm Rovers," "The Frame-Up," etc.

THIS really isn't my story, though I had something to do with it—a good deal to do with it; but because it is largely another fellow's story I shall have to pretend at times to have been eye-witness to things I heard about, and now and then perhaps I shall have to use a little of my imagination. But I know all the circumstances and all of the people too well to need to do much guessing about even the things I did not see.

And I may as well begin with the fact that around 2 A. M. on a drizzling Spring morning a young man with a strange girl at his side hurried out of the wet shadows and approached the entrance of the Riccardo Café.

The young man was into trouble and lots of it. He was young, lacking experience and without a very wise head on his shoulders; also he was dazed by being a newcomer in the biggest and most baffling city on earth—but more bewildered and dizzy by the young woman, whom he did not know, though the two of them had every reason for believing that they would ride to the morgue together.

He was not at all a timid young man, yet the chill of fear had got inside of him.

In fact he was a courageous boy; certainly headstrong and headlong, rash, passionate, chivalrous—one of those people in whom the width of a razor's edge divides virtue from viciousness. He had flaming energy and explosive impulses, and it was largely luck as to whether he went good or bad.

On that dark, damp morning he was decidedly in bad.

He felt that some time soon there was sure to be a knife-gripping hand thrust out of shadows at him, or a spurt of fire as a gun roared from a doorway behind his back. Gangsters would track him as a Hindu thug dogs footsteps.

He had no way to turn toward protection. He had no friends—excepting perhaps the strange girl at his side, and she was a crook. He was a total stranger to New York, where he had landed the evening before to look for trouble—and as surely as his name was Jackson Richmond he had found it.

Yet I must say, for I scrutinized that face closely, that there was no more evil in his countenance than in a portrait of Sir Galahad. He was a well-dressed youngster with an alert, honest, boyish face; but he had the firm-chiseled features of one who can't be bluffed. In a marked degree he had the look of his family. One who knew the Richmonds would have known him in any place for a Richmond.

They were a regular beehive of a family, a numerous and wealthy clan—very clannish too. On the surface most of them were a good deal like icicles.

They owned a good part of California and always acted as if they were on parade. Though they were stiff, conventional, religious, they were utterly honorable—arrogantly so. As a family they were stubborn as a lot of Dutchmen and pious as deacons; the sort of people who gave backbone to the nation and arguments for single-taxers.

An occasional black sheep appeared in the family fold; and to the perpetual and evident distress of the elders it was said, not without a basis of fact, that one Richmond in every generation was born to be hanged.

None of them had been hanged; but some had been shot, which was almost as bad in the eyes of the family fathers.

The pioneering Richmonds had not come across the plains in '49. Not at all. Nothing so plebeian as that. The family came in '51, very comfortably, with all its household gods and goods in a clipper chartered by Jackson McDonald Richmond.

This Richmond, though he increased the family fortune immensely, had been a most disgraceful black sheep. He was gallant and dangerous; a man who never broke his word, a lover of fast horses and women. Big, handsome, imperious, he hated a coward and a liar.

He lived to a good old age, then was killed. Five masked assassins rode down upon him as he was making the rounds of his ranch. Only two rode off; and one of these soon died from the wounds he carried away with him.

A grandson, then scarcely in his teens, a favorite of old McDonald Richmond's, searched out the unwounded assassin and killed him—gun to gun—in a crowded barroom. This grandson became the black beast of the family, but without any of the redeeming features of the picturesque grandfather; he simply became notorious as a gambler and gunman—became in fact myself, McDonald Richmond, alias Don Everhard.

I WAS held up as a great example to young Richmonds of the path they should not follow, and was a cause of anxiety and tribulation to the family since, in spite of my quiet and retiring disposition, I was often unlucky enough to have the police inquiring for me. Though it must be said to their credit that they gave me very little real annoyance; but newspapers often made much of nothing, as they have a way of doing—whereupon an apoplectic tremor would run through the California Richmonds.

A Richmond a professional gambler! It was unbearable. A Richmond a denizen of the underworld! For many years my name was not spoken unless in whispers among the elders.

This censorial secrecy was designed to protect baby Richmonds. Then one day it happened at a family affair that old Senator Richmond, ceremonious and pompous, but so honest he bent backward, lined the children before him. A swarming brood they were too. He began to inquire, with all the aplomb of a senatorial investigation, into their ambitions and careers.

My nephew Jackson brought about the sensation of an earthquake by calling out shrilly before his turn that he was going to be a gambler like Uncle Don. He scattered playing-cards on the floor in an eager effort to pull the pack from his pocket by way of showing the start he had already made.

Severe, astonished silence followed.

It had not been supposed that the children even knew of Don Everhard; or at most that they knew he was a Richmond.

But a cousin of about Jackson's age shrilled:

"Aw, you'd be scairt to shoot fellars like he does."

Thereupon a miniature daughter of the House of Richmond piped up—

"Marie says he never shooted anybody he oughtn't to."

Babble followed. All the children knew about "Uncle Don," and foolishly had pride in him and his notoriety. It is children, not gangsters and highwaymen, that have canonized Robin Hood. Jesse James is more admired in the prep-school dormitories than at Sing Sing. And the children thought I was the one important member of their family.

When the senator had recovered his powers of speech and gropingly restored the beribboned tortoise-shell nose-glasses astride his nose, a solemn counsel was held among the elders. Like the lawmakers of all time they were without humor.

Marie lost her job as governess. All the servants of all the households were sternly admonished never to mention *that* name. The children were instructed to forget all they had heard, and to learn that the fellow known as Everhard was a disgraced and shameful character. The unlucky accident of birth had made him a Richmond, but in no other way was he connected with the family.

But from that day on, by the way he was talked to, eyed and whispered about, Jackson was made to feel that he was a predestined sheep of color. He was naturally more insubordinate than his little relatives. Coming up from babyhood without a father, idolatrously regarded by his mother, eyed, advised, supervised by his uncles, great-uncles, with an assortment of austere aunts—all this, combined with the feeling of predestined deviltry, put the boy in the right way and mood to become a worthless and dangerous fellow.

He was rebellious as Lucifer, so they put him to work on the family ranch, where he wasted his time exploding shells at tin cans and prairie-dogs.

At the first crack of war in Europe he had tried to get across, though he was only sixteen.

For that matter, families all over America were kept busy snatching back their scurrying offspring that tried to hurry away into the war.

Later, when the United States did belatedly awaken to the inevitable, Jackson went as if shot from a springboard into the Army. He said that he was twenty-one, which was wrong of him, though nobody in his family, not even his adoring mother, denied it.

The irony of it was that Jackson's outfit was ordered to Honolulu—and kept there. The young fire-eater was set down in a lotus-grove. Guitars tinkled in the twilight. Ukeleles thummed and strummed their monotonously wistful melodies while fat brown ladies sighed for the soldier's love and dollars.

Jack Richmond did his best to raise the devil. He used what money he could get cabling to the senator. But his very first message, though edited rigorously by the cable company, painfully offended the senator, who liked formality.

Jack appealed to others of his family. But the Richmonds believed in advancement by what they called "merit" and did not approve of wire-pulling. Jack threatened to desert, but the only chance to get off the island undetected was to swim; and the sharks would have acted decidedly pro-German even if San Francisco had not been a week away by steamer.

He tried to fool the doctors and pretended to be sick, hoping for a transfer. He ate soap and cultivated the appearance of anemia. The medicine-men got on to him and he was tried for malingering.

The colonel who sentenced him made some scathing remarks about a soldier feigning illness in time of war; and Jack blew up.

He in turn made some remarks, and neither rappings nor shouts for silence closed his mouth before he had inquired if the colonel thought kissing nigger ladies and fighting booze was war. He further stated that he had not thought he was hooking up with the Y. M. C. A. when he joined the outfit he was in. He concluded with a shout that he wanted to be a soldier and not a —— policeman.

So Jack got an extra thirty days' bread and water, which he richly deserved for his disrespect to the fat colonel. For malingering he got three months in the guardhouse.

He never got overseas.

When the war ended Jack came home with no pride in himself. His war record was bad, disgraceful. He had cousins and uncles who had done all that he wanted to do. Some had medals and many had wounds. There was even a thin girlish cousin of prim manners who had got into the dispatches and had won from his fellow soldiers the name of "Reckless Richmond."

Jack was in no mood to accept the paternal meddling the family fathers began on the youngsters. He quarreled with his elders and became sullen. He outraged the family by declaring that he was tired of being a Richmond. His mother often felt the same way, but she did not acknowledge the feeling.

Jack felt cheated about the war, too. He said that when he was in trouble and had appealed to the whole tribe for help not one among them had so much as wiggled a little finger to help him get to France. His mother, of course, felt that this was due to her earnest though silent prayers.

Jack's money was tied up so he could not touch anything excepting the interest until he was twenty-five; but a few days after he was twenty-one he plundered all the interest money he could get hold of—the elderly Richmonds were always reinvesting it for him—and bolted. He left a vague but affectionate note for his mother. She need not worry about him. He could take care of himself. He would get along. When he got settled he would drop a line to let her know how he was coming along.

He did not intimate whether he had gone to China or the moon.

Such is the heartlessness of youth.

His mother, a lovely woman, was secretly so weary of the corset-like stiffness and austere supervision of the Richmonds that she would gladly have bolted with him.

SO IT was that Jack Richmond, with something like two thousand dollars currency in his pockets, a small amount of baggage and two large automatics tied to him, arrived in New York on a drizzling evening and wondered what to do with himself.

If a policeman had noticed his bulging hips he would have been taken care of.

Nobody but officers is allowed to carry arms, or even own a revolver; which means that lawbreakers go as heavily armed as they ever did, and also have the additional assurance that no lonely pedestrian is likely to pull a gun just as the gaspipe is about to fall on his head.

There is nothing that gives a crook more cockiness than the knowledge that his intended victim is unarmed. For all of its laws, policemen, sentences of judges and howls of the public, crime was never so general and audacious in New York as in these days of legal severity. The Bowery has been fumigated; saloons wiped out; all the haunts and dens of vice opened to the personal inspection of Citizen Reformers; but the gangs are more numerous and not less successful than ever, though they use the same old tricks and stalls and grafts as those practised in the underworld of Babylon.

Like almost everybody else that arrived in the city that Spring, Jack went to a hotel and calmly asked for a room. By the time he had gone to three hotels he began to realize that the clerks had a right to be impudent and superior. It wasn't a matter of putting your name on a register and tipping the boy for showing you up. It was a matter of prepaid reservations, if not leases.

He checked his baggage and started scouting for a place to sleep. He wandered far, up and down stairways even. It grew late and his feet were weary.

He went into a telephone booth and lost his temper. The clerical voices were coolly disdainful of any unneeded patronage. He got so tired of the acquired English accent and boredom of tone that he wanted to shout, "Hurrah for Ireland!"

A strange city on a wet night is always a dismal place; and there is about as little human warmth in New York for the stranger as on the snow-fields of Iceland. If a New Yorker is polite it is because he has either a gold-brick or a gaspipe up his sleeve; but it is the strange New Yorkeress who is preeminently to be shunned. That is, if one wishes to have any claim at all to wisdom.

The best thing to do with a strange woman—in any city—is to leave your coat-tails in her hand and flee. The more innocent she seems, the louder you should yell for a cop.

Jack Richmond had much to learn, particularly about women—either the strange or domesticated variety. Also he was serenely unaware of the fact that the newcomer to New York wears for a time a sort of distinctive aura that is visible to the lynx-eyed prowlers of the street. Not until he has been knocked over by a taxi, gouged by a waiter, bilked by a rental agent, short-changed by a ticket-broker, or in numerous ways been cheated, flimflammed, nicked, picked and pecked, does he assume the outward aspect of a Gothamite.

Jack came out of the telephone booth perspiring and ready to kill a couple of people. Any couple. He felt savage. There must be some sort of conspiracy among clerks that they were all agreed on the lie of "full up."

As he stood in the glow of the drug-store window, collar up-turned and brow studiously wrinkled under his back-tilted hat, the woman saw him. Hers were keenly appraising eyes. Dark eyes, suggestive of moods and temper. She watched him indecisively for a time, hesitant because of his youth. Fat middle-aged men usually carry the wads worth going after; but pickings were slim.

It was getting along toward midnight, and the dismal cañons that New Yorkers call streets were deserted except for scurrying figures here and there, and autos that seemed to be monstrous bugs with the headlights wavering sensitively over the wet street like luminous antennæ.

The woman stepped out of the shadows, appearing as if by magic up from the dark, wet pavement that was like a black mirror.

Jack could not help but see her.

She was young, also pretty in the bizarre way of girls that make their living through being noticed. That is, the effect was a little stagy. But Jack was green and impressionable.

She knew the dark alleyways and turnings of the city, its danger places, both those gay and bleak; also she knew men—her specialty was men. Almost any woman, if her credit is good at the dressmaker's, can pick up almost any man; but either out of excess of caution or through vanity of her art she set out to hook Jack without letting him know that he was being caught.

And though she appeared almost magically before him she took no notice of him at all.

He saw the puzzled, worried look on her pretty face as she examined her bag, pushed back her cloak and fumbled in her pockets, looked here and there, even about her feet. As he watched he saw that the tears were almost ready to come. But she had not glanced at him. She was unaware of his existence.

But of course it was plain what had happened. The poor girl had lost her purse. Perhaps she didn't have even carfare. A girl, alone, in a big, dismal city, raining midnight; the very pavement under her daintily shod feet should have felt pangs of sympathy. Jack did, anyway.

He had plenty of nerve but not much gall. If he had held off a little longer she would have spoken to him, but he did not know that. So he put his hat in his hand and tried to look fatherly as he spoke to her.

She drew back, a little startled. It looked very much as if she was going to misunderstand his intentions.

He hastened to assure her that he hoped she would pardon him, but she seemed distressed. Perhaps she had lost something? Could he be of help?

She regarded him wide-eyed with slow, doubtful appraisal, as if a little afraid; which made him feel even more apologetic. She was really very pretty and quite young. He did not notice that her face was rather thin, nose small and narrow, and that there were faint hardening lines about her small rosebud mouth.

One look at her and any New York cop would have had her number, though he perhaps could not have told just what distinguishing marks gave him the hunch. But Jack was about as far from having the wisdom of a New York copper as he was from having the age of Methuselah.

She seemed a little reassured, and said, "I must have lost it," then glanced around as if there was a chance of picking up the lost article. Her voice was sweet with a faint thrilling echo of baby-talk in it.

"You have lost something?"

He was all concern, and, putting his hat on, came a step nearer. Also he looked about the pavement as if to find a lost something, too.

"My purse—it isn't here," and she held up a small velvet bag to show where the purse should have been.

"I—aw—ah—" he said.

"I can't imagine how——"

SHE left the sentence suspended and looked straight at him as if hopeful that he could imagine and would tell her.

He could not help but see that she had dark eyes, though from under her snug little fur toque were dampened wisps of yellow hair. Her eyes were wide and staring. She looked almost like a lost little child in a great big forest, which made him feel very protective and gallant.

"I would like—you know—like to help you—anyway."

She drew back a little—not much, but just enough to give a suggestion of hesitancy; and he hastened to assure her that it would be all right. He didn't mean a *thing*.

He was nervous and excited, though he came from a family whose men were almost notoriously cold-blooded and unexcitable.

"But I only want to get home. It is most unusual for me to be down-town at night, and— My purse— I don't know what I shall do if——"

She had a way of ending the sentences vaguely, leaving them dangling in the air and as she stood with lips parted slightly and eyes very wide and trustful he could not do a thing less than offer to take her home. Which was precisely what she had known all the time that he would do.

In his eagerness to do just that it did not occur to him that he might have advanced a small sum by way of good-samaritanism, and that the present of taxi fare *should* have been more acceptable to her than his company. But perhaps if youth were sensible and wise and suspicious and cautious, then the pleasure of being young and lusty would be lost. One might as well be born middle-aged and dyspeptic. Somehow youth seems to carry its own pardon along with it even as it goes blundering into folly.

No doubt she was a little surprized that in the taxi he continued to treat her respectfully. She was not used to having men sit so far away. Ordinarily only chumps did that. Nobody can pick a man's pocket if he stays three feet away. And perhaps she did not try to lead him on then; or it may have been that he was blind to her little hints.

He respected her. This attitude was unique to her. It may be that she almost liked him for it.

He talked with a nervous, boyish effort to be agreeable. She eyed him with a sort of warm, soft smile, set mask-like, while her thoughts were busy with other things. Picking the pocket was not her regular means of livelihood, largely because she lacked the elusive deftness of a true gon-moll. The circumstances had to be favorable, like those offered by a close embrace and a jolty road.

When the taxi stopped before an expressionless brick-faced apartment-house, she asked softly with an alert little conspirator air if he wouldn't like to come up a minute and have a drink.

"Drink" has become a magic word. People who care nothing about booze now perk up and smack their lips if offered a hooker of tea-colored dynamite. Prohibitionists go around sadly wondering what is the matter with human nature.

Jack cared about as much for whisky as he did for turpentine flavored with cayenne; but what he did care about was the invitation, so he looked silly and eager.

He told the taxi to wait; but the taxi was a cynic and wanted to know "What for?" So Jack paid for an hour in advance, and as the taxi could see he had not taken its number it rolled off as soon as he was out of sight.

Nobody but a very young idiot would ever let himself be led around at midnight into a strange apartment by a strange lady without growing suspicious of her kindness; but fools rush in where devils walk on tiptoes. Jack was a little agitated by the adventure, and rapidly growing more and more affected by what beauty the girl had.

The apartment was warm and cozy, about as big as a couple of bandboxes sewed together. The furniture was of the highly varnished kind, spindle-legged chairs with plush backs. A young countryman like Jack would get the impression of wealth; but six months of city life would have made him think the apartment gaudily shabby. Value is always a matter of perspective; a starving man feasts on crusts, and Jack felt that something exceptionally fortunate in the way of romance had fallen to him.

She had him give up his damp top-coat and hat. She was hospitable and cheerful. She removed her cloak and hat, peered in a mirror and impudently powdered her nose before his face. He liked it.

Her hair was short, bobbed, blondined. Her skirts were short, which gave her emphatically a school-girl appearance; and there was no age in her face—at least none apparent to his eyes. Her voice was sweet, honeyed. It made him want to squeeze her, but he didn't. He was afraid she might not like it, and he did not want to offend her.

She swept a collection of ornamental knick-knacks from the table and brought out a lunch cloth with a lot of yellow birds on it. Then she brought cheese, salami, rye bread, dill pickles and stuffed olives out for a sandwich. He was eager and helpful.

She opened the doors of a little cabinet and dragged forth John Barleycorn by the neck and put him on a little tray with two small glasses. She motioned toward the cabinet, which was well stocked with bottles.

"I got a friend on the prohib payroll. Pinches booze. Confiscates it, you know. Pours part of it in the gutter. Keeps the rest. He's a good judge o' whisky."

Somehow Jack did not like the idea of her having any other friends in the world than himself. He rather resented that vague prohibition official; but he couldn't speak of it just then.

He let her fill his glass because he wanted to do the manly thing and take a full-sized drink; and she knew exactly how he felt. She was half-amused and really liked him. He was so young and eager, also rather handsome.

For herself she scarcely covered the bottom of the glass. She was wise in the evil of the world, and knew that whisky and women do not mix well.

It pleased her to see how easily she could make a fool of the boy. She said, "Excuse me a min'te," and tripped out with a mysterious air as if to bring a surprize.

She brought the surprize with her all right. It came in the form of a creamy kimono stained with the falling petals of intensely red roses; and she was inside of it. She had slipped it on over her dress as the other way would have taken too long.

Jack gasped. His admiration was transparent. More than that, he exclaimed—

"Great ——, but you are pretty!"

"Am I?" she asked a little wistfully, as if slightly saddened because she wasn't sure if he were sincere.

"You *are*. Wonderful! I think you are beautiful. Honest. I can't tell you how beautiful I think you are."

Her face was pensively downcast as she remarked:

"What if my husband should come in an' hear you say——"

"HUSBAND!"

Jack felt as if a large, icy fist had been planted in his stomach. He was really unnerved for a moment, as any man might be upon finding himself in all innocence turned into a sneak, a poacher, a violator of family ties. Out of the largeness of his innocence he had thought it impossible for a girl to run around the streets of New York without being appropriated by some man with eyes as good as his own. She had a husband.

Jack turned white and became quiet.

"What is the matter?" she cried, really surprized.

He had been agitated and nervous before. Now he was suddenly calm, nerveless.

"This husband. I didn't think—" he stammered.

"Are you afraid?"

There was a vague touch of contempt.

"Afraid?" he repeated. "What of? No. I am not afraid."

He was looking hard at her.

"No. Not of him," he added.

"Why—why, boy, what *is* the matter?"

"Matter?" he asked sardonically. "Matter? I'm afraid my wife may come and catch me."

She laughed and impulsively threw her arms about him, but he pushed her aside roughly.

"Get away. Keep off. This husband fellow—why wasn't he here to say, 'How-de-do' when I came? I'd like to meet him. You should—you should train him better. Make him hospitable to your friends."

The woman suddenly realized that she had got this boy all wrong. It was part of the badger game to prepare the victim for the coming of the husband and have him already nervous, afraid.

But Jack did not fall true to type. She would have to spin her tongue and go some to throw a scare into him, for unless the sucker is scared he may object to loosening up on his roll.

Rapidly, in the breathless, confidential way that a woman has when lying desperately, she began.

Her husband was a terrible fellow. He had killed two men. He was jealous of her. He beat her.

"The lousy dog," said young Jack Richmond, straightening up and never for a moment having a flicker of doubt at the truth of her story.

"Some day he will kill me!" she cried.

She really got interested in her own story, and spun a wild-eyed romance of which she was the unlucky heroine. She told of how she had been beaten up; and in this she did not need much imagination. Nor did she fabricate greatly in telling of the fear for her life.

But she played wildly on his sympathy with picturesque details of her abused days. She had no friends. No one to love. No one to trust.

She leaned forward affectionately, but Jack did not notice.

He was a hare-brained youngster with no discretion, and did not realize that a serpent's fangs are more to be trusted than a strange woman's tongue; but sheer innate honesty protected him. If she were married he had no right to offer her a caress. The pious bludgeonings and cold blood of the Richmonds showed up surprizingly at the critical moment.

As they sat there, Jack in breathless silence, his every sense of justice aflame, and the woman breathlessly imagining abuses of her husband, there came a rough knocking on the door and a blustering voice shouted:

"Here, open dis door! What's goin' on in me own joint?"

"My husband!" the woman gasped, and almost fell from her chair.

After a preliminary bluster and clatter on the door to intimidate the victim and prepare him for the collapse the man opened it easily enough. Any sensible man inside the room with the "wife" would have been frightened out of his wits; but Jack was young enough to be crazy and of a temperament that was not disturbed by threats.

"Butch" Malloy lurched inside. His big cap was twisted at an angle that almost concealed one side of his face. The ear on the other side was crumpled and disfigured. His pugilistic arms were swung from his body in the attitude of a rushing gorilla. He looked tough, dangerous.

His fists were about the size of hams. His jaw was thrust out like a bulldog's. The police knew him for a bad egg, a gangster that would fight.

He started impetuously to say something about croaking somebody, but his words were twisted, choked, shut off; and the outraged attitude suddenly became one of humble surrender. His hands went up and his jaw dropped down. He was looking into the mouth of an automatic that seemed big enough to swallow him.

"I was wishing you would come," said Jack with precocious coolness as he drew himself up to the righteous attitude of a Righter of Wrongs. "I've been hearing about you. Now be still and don't try to argue. I've got reenforcements right here handy."

With that he pulled out the second automatic and trained its cannon-like muzzle on the astonished gangster.

The woman made a sobbing sound so curiously like hysteric laughter that Jack turned and glanced at her; but her face was hid in her folded arms as she crouched in a chair before the table covered with the untouched delicatessen feast. In turning, Jack had laid himself open to attack from the gangster who was poised as if to rush; but Butch hesitated half a second too long.

"Why don't you try it?" Jack asked with icy contempt. "I'll make you look like a doughnut, you try anything on me. I'm going to teach you how it feels to get beat up."

A GLEAM of hope appeared in Butch's eye. If the young fool put down his guns to try fist-blows—well, he had got the name of "Butcher" in the squared ring, where in his younger days he had stood a chance at the welterweight title. But laziness and beer had tarnished his fistic honors; yet he was confident enough in his ferocious mug and threatening fists to play the badger game without a gat. If a fellow had a gun on him the girl was supposed to have removed it; but under the strict antigun-packing law pick-ups were seldom heeled. But, so to speak, Jack had run in a marked deck on the badgers.

"Take off your coat," said the boy.

Butch hesitated.

With the cold arrogance of one of his own great-uncles, Jack added—

"My man, move when I speak to you!"

Butch moved. Especially he moved his lips, from which curses flowed like oil from an overturned bottle—just oozed out smoothly and effortlessly.

Again the queer hysteric laughter-like sob came from the woman. Jack was too busy to look at her. Butch had shed his coat.

She was Butch's girl, all right; but there were times when she hated him. Not when he beat her, but when he mockingly told her of the other woman who was also his girl; and, according to Butch, much prettier and a more successful rustler. It might have been a consolation to know that he told the other girl the same thing.

It had been at Butch's insistence, emphasized by a series of pinches on the arms—unless greatly provoked he did not bat her in the eye since it impaired her working ability for days to come—that she had gone out on a rainy evening to grab off something.

She did not know anything about poetic justice, but it pleased her sense of humor to see Butch's ham-like hands up in the air as if he were getting ready to try to fly. She knew that she must pay in the end, probably with two black eyes; but it was worth it—only she did not dare let him see her laugh.

And yet she wanted to laugh. She had worked that young fool up until he was going to punish Butch for beating her—and Butch would beat her harder than ever for not having got those guns put aside. But how could she suspect that such an innocent would be packing a pair of rods—particularly when he kept her an arm's length away? It was a good joke in spite of her grievance.

Having caused the coat to be shed, Jack ordered—

"Your shirt now—climb out of it."

"W'at?" Butch cried, his brow furrowed with honest puzzlement, his indignation rising.

"Come, come," said the young lunatic, who was cool and nerveless as the proverbial cucumber. "Take off that shirt."

The sentence came out crisply, like a drill-sergeant talking to a club-footed recruit; and the twin automatics settled down so menacingly that Butch hurriedly began scratching at his collar. It was a silk shirt of wide blue and yellow stripes, and Butch tore it; which made him swear, for it was a new shirt. But he got it off, and stood forth in heavy woolen underwear from the waist up.

Jack spoke again.

"Get out of that underwear."

"W'a-a-at!" came in long-drawn astonishment from the outraged Butch. Butch was a gang leader, a hard-boiled nut, full of crimes and even a bit red of hand; he didn't know what morals were—but he was not immodest. And the unreasoning demand shocked him.

"I'll be —— foist!"

"As you say," answered the cold and heartless young idiot to as dangerous a gangster as there was in the city; and he lifted an automatic as if merely taking a little care to put the bullet directly between Butch's eyes.

Butch changed his mind about his willingness to be ——; and as he clawed at the buttons of his undershirt he looked in anger and exasperation toward the woman in the chair. But she was not watching. She was careful to avoid Butch's eyes.

For one thing she was afraid of the threat that would be there. For another she was willing to see Butch get his if he thought so much of the other lizzie.

"Clear out of it," said Jack.

Butch was glowering and uncertain. He did not know what was coming, but enough had already arrived to make him uneasy. His fingers twitched with longing to get hold of that fool's slender neck. He tried to beg off and explain, but the "shut up" was emphatic. The mouths of the two monstrous automatics gaped at him steadily.

"Now," said Jack with an air of finality, "down on your belly—flat on the floor."

Butch's jaw dropped as if broken. He stared dully. Insult was being added to indecency.

"Do you want me to drop you?" the boy threatened, ramming one of the guns against the bare ribs of Butch.

"——uh!" the gangster whined, shrinking from the chill muzzle.

"On your belly," Jack commanded as gutturally as he could.

"Say now, bo, looka here——"

"Take a half-hitch on your tongue."

"W'at's that?"

"Shut up."

"I'll croak youse f'r dis," Butch muttered sullenly, drawing his head down into his shoulders like a snake that settles on itself to strike.

"Come on, get down. Clear down. That's it. More yet. Flat. Flat, I tell you. Put your hands out—out in front of you. Clear out. If you make a move I'll brain you."

Butch Malloy, a dude of gangdom, half-undressed and wholly humiliated, lay prone at the feet of his badger-game wife, while the young idiot she had roped in bowed politely to her.

Jack did not doubt her truthfulness, and he had belief in rigorous justice. To his way of thinking the wife-beater was about two feet lower than a cockroach.

The girl sat staring in real breathlessness and part alarm. She was mystified as to what was coming, and uneasy.

She was dumfounded when Jack said that now she was to repay her brute of a husband blow for blow and teach him the lesson of how it felt to be struck.

"Take off his belt and light into him. Make 'em warm, too."

It was her turn to gasp an astonished—"Wha-at?"

Butch let go of an enraged growl.

"Shut up," said Jack, sighting along the barrel at him. Adding:

"Take off his belt and start in. Wallop him good."

MAGGIE NEVIN, known as "Butch's Mag" to distinguish her from numerous other molls whose mothers had also liked Margaret for a monaker, felt herself in a pickle.

She did not at all understand *why* she should be thought eager to wallop her man. It was right and proper for a woman in the heat of a quarrel to bounce something off the head of her husband. That was part of married life and relieved the monotony that might otherwise have ended in divorce.

She was terrified at the idea of striking Butch. Sooner or later he would kill her for it, surely. At that moment she had no great love for Butch. She was even willing to stand by and see him get his, though she knew that she was storing up blackened eyes for herself.

Her eyes met Butch's angry, warning gaze. She had avoided him and his efforts to signal her to bean that fellow. The result was that he felt so completely double-crossed that he had begun to imagine the whole thing was a frame-up on himself.

It was beyond him, however, to imagine that anybody could be such a chivalrous, innocent fool as not to be agitated by the appearance of an outraged husband, and it looked suspiciously as if she had tipped this fellow off to play a little joke on him. No doubt she had wised the guy up that he, Butch, wouldn't be carrying a gun.

Butch shot some sentences at her that showed how he felt and what he thought; and he ended fiercely—

"Youse bot' go to t' morgue f'r dis!"

"Oh, yes. Yes. Certainly," said Jack. "We'll go to the morgue and identify you—if you don't keep your mouth shut."

The woman knew that Butch was in deadly earnest. He might in time cool off a little and listen to reason, but right then and there if he got the chance he would kill them both.

She said—

"He'll croak me sure!"

Jack said:

"No, not if you buy a poodle for a watch-dog. He'll keep away and buy himself a rag doll to beat up. Take his belt and give him a hundred cuts. I'll count 'em. What you waiting for?"

Oaths crackled from Butch. He writhed on to his side, twisting about and snarling threats.

"Shut up," said Jack, again sighting along the barrel of a gun; and there are few things more intimidating than to have a cold eye looking at you along the sights.

"He'll croak me," the girl whispered pathetically.

But Jack stooped over. He laid one of the guns on the seat of a chair behind him, and with the free hand pulled loose the belt in Butch's trousers.

As he did so the gangster motioned excitedly, whispering: "Nail it! Nail it!" meaning for her to pick up the gun on the chair seat; and when she hesitated he was half-crazed with anger. He reached out, grasping her ankle and bruising it in a fierce grip until she screamed.

At that Jack brought the belt down overhandedly and the buckle struck on Butch's face.

On the instant the gangster went mad. He forgot all about guns and everything else. He had the fury of a runty Samson, suddenly aware that Delilah was a double-crosser.

He slewed himself around at the blow, and, reaching upward with unexpected swiftness, snatched Jack's wrist, partly twisting the gun from his hand. Jack came down on top of him.

For a few seconds they struggled brutally, with Butch the stronger and fiercer, and much the more expert at the hazardous game of rough-and-tumble. He was the heavier too; and at last as he got a choking grip on the boy's neck he jested savagely, bending the boy's neck back almost to the breaking-point while with a free hand he easily tore the gun loose.

"To d' morgue, huh? Yes, soitenly—dis is where youse go—feet foist——"

Butch did not complete the sentence. A noiseless explosion full of fire-flashes and sparks seemed to go off inside of his head; and he settled over on his side, mouth agape and a trickle of blood seeping through the cut on his scalp while his throttling hold about the boy's neck relaxed.

SO IT came about that Jack and Butch's Mag fled through the drizzling night. Butch had been knocked out, and when he came to he would rally his gang and seek them far and wide. He would croak them both, just as he had said.

Jack knew less about where to go than if he had been blind-folded and turned loose in a labyrinth. Mag had made it convincingly plain that he would be knifed or shot by men he had never seen; and she had wailed—

"I ought 'a' bashed your bean; then Butch 'd 'a' listened to me."

But she might as well have spoken in Greek for all the understanding he got out of it.

He was dazed and left with a sense of helplessness at being made to know that there was no husband, that it was all a crook game, that he had been picked for a sucker and had messed up the show by springing his hardware. It was all befuddling to Jack.

There is no way of telling why Maggie

knocked Butch out at that crucial moment, for she did not know herself. She called herself a nut for having done it; but it was probably because she knew Butch would kill the boy. It may have been that she either liked the boy too much to think he ought to be croaked; or it may have been, as she afterward insisted, that she did it to save Butch from the chair—where he surely would have gone if he had killed the boy.

Anyway, pulling Jack after her, she made for Riccardo's Café. Riccardo was a power in the underworld. She knew him. Maybe he would help her out.

The modern underworld is not the sordid, dirty, noisy, flagrant place of popular imagination; and its citizens are not the unshaven and slovenly dressed toughs of Bowery traditions. Excepting among those places kept largely for the slumming trade there is nowadays very little to distinguish the joint of the king-pin gangster from that of an honest restaurateur who depends solely on robbery by menu for a livelihood.

In her flight Maggie made straight for Riccardo's, which was known to the police as a kind of headquarters for people who ought to have been mugged, even if they weren't. For instance, in some of the private dining-rooms up-stairs there were frequently large games of poker. In other dining-rooms mobs laid the plans for jobs. At other tables friends could meet socially. Riccardo's was quiet and popular.

The street in front of the café was empty as that of a dead city. The rain sifted down in a fine spray, scarcely more than a mist, and even the street-lights seemed dampened.

"Listen, kid," she said, taking hold of his arm at the entrance, "you and me 's in Dutch together, and if I don't frame a spiel that strikes Riccardo right—well, kid, you an' me 'll be layin' in the morgue this time tomorrow waiting for the cor'ner to look us over. I don't know what's jinxed me. I wouldn't 'a' hit Butch with that strap for a thousand dollars, yet I brained him with a gat-butt. My luck was sure born cross-eyed.

"And I'm telling you flat I ain't got a thing against you, only—" and here her voice rose in a petulant little wail—"I wish to —— you'd died in your cradle."

And it happened that this part of the conversation was overheard by a tall, rather slender man, dressed in black, who carried a slim, black, fragile walking-stick and had a very slight limp.

He was just inside the entrance door. He had seen them coming and had stepped back that they might come in; but then they paused and the girl spoke as quoted. Her remarks were enough to interest any one.

The man in black continued to wait, and when the girl came in he gave her a quick glance and knew her by her type. The thing that had really impressed him was the unusual generosity with which she had claimed not to hold a grudge against the fellow who had evidently brought down the cross-eyed luck upon her. The girl, only semi-civilized, was honest in her way.

The man took a look at the boy—stared in fact; and it was not his habit to stare at strangers. He knew the boy and his type better even than he knew the girl; and the boy's strained, set face was much the more interesting. He followed them back into the restaurant.

The head waiter approached, his glassy eye fixed appraisingly on them. At their request for a room he shook his head in humble regret. There was no room untaken or at least not reserved. He knew that Maggie was a patron of no importance, and thought she had hooked a greenhorn whose strained, bloodless face indicated worry and did not denote a spending spirit. Riccardo's frowned upon street-girls who dragged their pick-ups there. It was hard enough to keep reformers from finding out too much as it was.

But over their shoulders the head waiter caught the eye of the man in black who had followed them; and he suddenly remembered that there was one room, unoccupied. It had slipped his mind. He led the way.

The man in black with the slight limp followed.

They went up the curtained stairway, and the head waiter himself played usher; for he had considerable respect for the thin, slender, gray-eyed man in black that followed.

Maggie and the boy went into the room, and the man followed them in without a word and stood quietly looking at the boy. At first the man was not noticed except as one unconsciously notices a waiter standing by to get the order.

"I gotta have a drink before I talk to

Riccardo," and with that Maggie raised her eyes to the stranger she had mistaken for a waiter.

She gave so surprized a gasp that it was obvious she recognized the man; but a slight gesture kept her silent.

JACK had quit being surprized at anything that happened. He looked at the man abstractly and seemed indifferent as to whether he was a waiter or not.

The girl's attitude was constrained. The caste system is scarcely less defined in gangland than in India; and this man she knew by sight as one with a reputation for a killer and an underworld Brahmin. His voice was low, soft, but not very pleasant.

He was rather expert at bluffing, so he opened the conversation easily by settling himself at the table and asking—

"What's the row between you and Butch?"

Naturally it seemed that Butch had recovered, telephoned to various places and already spread the news. Maggie was troubled. She began to tell the story; but the stranger appeared to pay no attention, and most of the time was watching Jack. He even interrupted to ask—

"You haven't been in New York long?"

"About—let's see—five or six hours. What time is it? Oh, I've been here about eight hours."

"And you are from——"

"California."

"Your name happens to be——"

"Richmond. Jack Richmond."

The stranger smiled slightly. He had thin, cold lips; and other people than Jack had thought him insultingly remote of manner and aloof even while asking impertinent questions. But as a matter of fact Jack mistook him for Riccardo, of whom Maggie had spoken so emphatically.

Maggie went on with her story, and grew excited as she went. She told it all with naive frankness, but swore up and down that she had struck Butch to keep him from the chair. He would have killed the kid.

There was now nothing of the seductive baby-talk in her voice. She was a daughter of gangland, talking for her life, squaring herself. She knew that the man to whom she talked was close in with Riccardo, but even a caste or two above him. What this man said to Riccardo would have weight; what Riccardo said to Butch would be law.

". . . now if I'm a liar may the—— catch me 'fore I takes another breath. I give it to this boy too strong about Butch bein' a walloper. He does slam me around some, but who's got a better right 'n him? Well, I don't throw a scare into this kid a-tall.

"Say—" and she turned half-wrathful eyes on him— "he don't scare worth a sour bean. He puts Butch in the air with two toy cannons that I never knowed he had; an' Butch thinks it's the double x I'm handing him. So you see where I stood to get off, right from the time the ponies got away. . . ."

The man wrote a note, called a waiter and sent it out.

". . . Butch 'll croak me sure. And I wouldn't give him the throw-down for a mill*yon* dollars. I wouldn't. Honest. He ought to know it, too. It 'd 'a' been a jolt o' the juice in the chair f'r him if I hadn't beaned him. Don't you see it would? I'm telling you straight.

"And honest, I didn't want to see this kid get hurted. He's all right, only he just didn't understand about me an' Butch."

The humiliation of disillusionment bore down heavily on the boy.

He sat dejected, ashamed, angry. From the girl's lips he heard that she had trapped him on the street and carried him off, all merely as an every-day incident in her way of life. Just to trim him for his roll.

He felt as sickened as if awakening from a pipe of yen-shee. There is nothing more humbling than to know that one has been a fool with the idea of being very gallant.

He refused to seem to be listening to what was said, but sat with eyes averted.

AN HOUR later there were certain developments.

Riccardo had come in response to the note. He eyed the boy with unusual interest, twisted his little spiked mustache, blinked his dark, gimlet eyes.

He scarcely noticed the girl. She was only a cheap little crook, known to him by sight; and Riccardo did not like to encourage the idea that women could come to him when they quarreled with their sweethearts. But the boy interested him greatly.

So he went out, and by sending messengers and having others telephone he finally got Butch's ear on the wire; and Butch said that if Riccardo felt that way about it of course he was willing to call it quits; but that it was going to be mighty hard to make him glad to see Mag again if he couldn't bash her in the nose.

But when Riccardo mentioned the name of the slender man with the slight limp and said that *he* was interested in having Maggie's nose retain its classic shape and purity of color Butch acknowledged that he had lost all desire to punch it. Such is the virtue of a reputation; the man with the limp was known as a killer, with friends in the high places.

Maggie took the news with a cry of joy, and jumped up, eager to be gone that she might the sooner be reconciled to her Butcher. If he would only listen to reason he would be grateful to her for that crack on the head. It had saved him from the chair, sure.

As she was going she caught a glance and a gesture from the stranger. What he signaled surprized her, and she hesitated; but at his silent insistence she suddenly flung herself in a good-by caress on to the boy. It was a determined sort of caress, as if she had expected resistance; besides, her work as a pickpocket was a little coarse at best.

But Jack took it sullenly. He only half-heartedly pushed at her to make her get away; so after squeezing his neck and wishing him good luck, she darted through the door with a padded wallet slipped into her waist.

That would do something to make Butch mighty glad to see her; but out of the wisdom of many past experiences she would secretly divide the roll into two parts, one of which would go into a hiding-place known to herself and to no one else.

ALONE in the private dining-room where nothing had been served, Jack and the man in black sat silent for a long time. Jack kept his eyes toward the floor, and the man watched him.

"You're a long way from home, son," said the man.

No answer.

"Know anybody here?"

He shook his head, then added that he had an uncle that sometimes came to New York, but had never known his address.

"Maybe you've heard of him," the boy said with a stir of life. "His name's Everhard. Don Everhard."

And the man asked with cruel softness—

"Haven't you had about enough to do with crooks without looking up this uncle?"

He dropped his head. The glamour of crookdom and errantry had diminished.

"You have a little money, I suppose?"

The boy wearily patted his pocket as a man does in half-heartedly taking an unnecessary precaution; then he sat up stiffly and with more interest began patting other pockets and thrusting inquiring fingers into them.

"I must have—it's gone—lost it. I—it must have fallen out of my pocket—I thought I had it."

He was talking slowly, without accent or emphasis, like a man hypnotized.

"Your friend Maggie took it when she kissed you good-by. You thought she really liked you a bit, didn't you? My son, beware of women—particularly the woman that likes you.

"Now listen. You are a long way from home. You have no money. You have no friends. This uncle of yours—Everhard—I know him slightly. I can say that he has done me a favor a time or two. Now supposing this morning that I see you on the train with a ticket back to your old home town—what d' you say?"

Jack looked up, his eyes steady; and he answered quietly, with finality:

"No. What I want is a breakfast and a bed. Then I'll get a job some place—and I'll earn my own fare back. I don't take any money off crooks. Not meaning to offend anybody, you know. But I'm saying just how I feel about it."

So naturally as I sat there with him and he did not know who I was, I was proud of him; for earlier in the evening he had shown himself to be a boy of spirit and honest gallantry, and in the wee hungry hours of morning he proved himself a fellow of backbone and good judgment.

Mashlugi's Mucklucks*

by Frank Richardson Pierce

SOONER or later they would clash, these two arctic rovers, and when it did happen deep-water men and coastwise only hoped they would be near enough to witness the fight. Perhaps it would be on the beach at Nome after a season in the ice, or maybe in some bay or open water of the ice-dotted arctic.

There was Madison—a two-fisted man and a square shooter, with just a touch of sentiment in his make-up to add to his fighting qualities. The Siberian as well as the North American natives who came down from the arctic regions to trade rare furs and ivory knew Madison and liked him. He spoke the different dialects and contrary to many traders who prided themselves on their ability to handle the different tribes in their own tongue, Madison did not "talk like a woman," as the men frequently stated, when discussing the traders in general. Among the different tribes there are many words meaning the same, but differing slightly in spelling and diction—the men of the tribe using one form exclusively and the women the other. To "talk like a woman" is to lose caste.

Madison's great chest and powerful arms, too, also interested them. Once they had seen him pick up an anchor and toss it over the side. The strongest man in the tribe had failed to lift it when he attempted the feat several days later. Madison had consoled him by actually giving him a pound of tea and asking nothing in return.

In contrast to Madison there was Black Pete. Pete believed in taking what he wanted. He drove a sharp bargain and his goods were never of the best. The ammunition he traded did not always explode and sometimes a native's life depended upon the proper functioning of the cartridge. Other goods brought by this trader did not measure up to what the natives believed to be the standard. And for them they had exchanged their good furs and ivory. He was also inclined to jeer at their traditions and beliefs. Madison respected them, though he might indulge in a quiet laugh in the privacy of his cabin.

While they might admire Madison's great strength, they feared the same quality in Pete. Where Pete had come from no one knew. It was hinted that a series of deals in the South Sea islands had made the locality unhealthy for him.

And as both men were in the same trade, touching at the same villages, it was inevitable they should meet at times. Madison made little attempt to conceal his contempt for the other's methods and his treatment of the natives.

"He'll put every white trader in bad if he keeps it up," Madison told them at Nome, and his auditors agreed.

Besides this there was a personal account to settle. In a race for a certain village for a particularly rich catch of furs Pete had played a rather underhanded trick. It was in the days before the revolution and Russian gunboats patrolled the

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Siberian coast-line. Pete had encountered one of the craft and coming alongside informed the commander that Madison, with a schooner-load of whisky, was bound on a trading-expedition.

Because Madison had no wish to be held up while his schooner was searched, and for the excitement of the thing, he had led the gunboat a merry chase amid the ice-fields. In the mean time Pete had made the most of his opportunity and secured the furs. After that Pete, who had seen Madison in Nome several times, was careful to avoid him.

This year they had again met for the first time. Pete smiled a bit nervously and kept his hand in his coat pocket. Madison had nodded shortly and passed on. Both schooners had put into Nome for fuel, and from the activity aboard the *Cleo*—Pete's craft—Madison suspected they intended sailing immediately. However about ten o'clock that night, though the midnight sun seemed trying to prove it was still day, Pete's mate put off in a dory and some time later boarded the *Mary* where he greeted Madison pleasantly.

"You haven't got much use for Pete and he knows it," began the mate, "and he sent me over to see if you wouldn't let bygones be bygones and join forces for a big clean-up. He knows of a tribe that's pretty well stocked up with furs and ivory. Last year they wouldn't listen to reason and no trading was done. The chief is a wise old bird and it seems he's heard about the high cost of living. We want more for our stuff, and so he wants more for his to sort of even things up."

"True!" agreed Madison, "and why not? You get more for furs and ivory at Seattle than you used to."

"Yeah," replied the mate, "but why let these natives cut in on the money? It don't cost 'em any more to trap and hunt."

"Yes, it does, if we charge 'em more for our goods," replied Madison; "but go on with your proposition."

"Pete's got a big idea. Since the revolution in Russia the coast ain't patrolled so much. Two schooners, such as the *Mary* and *Cleo*, with men who ain't afraid of trouble could make a raid an' get several years' stock of furs and ivory for nothing."

"Yes?" queried Madison. "And kill the confidence the natives have in white traders for years to come."

"Well," replied the other uneasily, "we won't be here to worry about it."

"You go back to Pete," ordered Madison in a dangerous tone, "and ask him why he didn't have courage enough to come aboard himself with the proposition. And tell him for me that he's going to play a white game in his dealings along the Siberian coast or I'll see to it that he does."

"Yes, sir," replied the mate respectfully, "but is that a suggestion or a threat?"

"That's a threat!" retorted Madison. "It's the only sort of language he understands. Now get out!"

The mate went over the side a bit hurriedly.

"Which means," said Madison thoughtfully, "we'll have trouble with that fellow before the season's over. He don't know how to deal fairly."

MADISON knew the place Pete had in mind when his mate had referred to a store of furs and ivory. On the bleak coast of Siberia at Whalen was a prosperous tribe. Each year the walrus came down and the mighty hunters of the tribe fared forth and returned laden with meat for food and hides for clothing which the women skilfully made up. Thanks to old Mashlugi, the medicine-man, evil spirits and devils were under his control, and rarely did sickness overtake a member of the village. To him was rightfully accorded full credit for prosperity, and his power was as great as that of Emalcroit, the chief. Together they worked in perfect harmony.

Because she was the faster vessel, the *Mary* dropped anchor off the village several days before the *Cleo* could possibly arrive. Madison was ashore a half-hour later, considerably puzzled. Although there was evidence of recent occupancy, not a human being was in sight. A strange situation, thought Madison, whose previous visits had been attended with considerable excitement and much activity on the part of the various types of skin-boats.

It was but a few rods to the top of a low hill, and as a faint trail led to the summit, his curiosity prompted him to follow it. A member of the crew, making his first voyage "into the ice" accompanied him.

In a small depression just over the hill a strange sight greeted the pair. The entire tribe was solemnly holding on to a rope, which was supported near the other end by a spar, set upright in the ground. With his head through a noose, and pulled clear of the ground, an unfortunate kicked and squirmed about in the last agonies of strangulation. He was blue in the face, while his untied arms threshed wildly.

Almost at the same instant Mashlugi caught sight of the pair. Without loosening his own hold, nor expressing surprize at their unexpected appearance, he shouted something in his native tongue.

"To —— with you!" replied Madison.

Again came an order from the native, who had apparently understood Madison's retort to his first command, though it had been spoken in English.

"All right, old sport, I won't then. When you get through hanging that guy, come down to the schooner and we'll talk business."

And without another word or glance Madison turned on his heel and walked over the hill. The seaman followed closely.

"What'd that old cuss say?" he queried.

"Told us to get hold of the rope with the rest of them. I wasn't going to help hang the poor devil, so I told him to go to ——. He said we couldn't look on, so I replied we would go."

"What's the big idea, do you suppose?"

"Oh, these people kill off their aged and infirm," Madison explained, "and considering the hard life they lead and the fact that it's impossible to carry them along I suppose it is really a merciful thing to do, even though we don't do things that way.

"They give them the choice of being hanged, stabbed or shot. All parties take it as a matter of course. At East Cape once a fellow came in and stated his mother was pretty bad and he guessed they'd have to kill her. The chief looked her over and I'll admit she was in a bad way. She elected to be stabbed and they placed her on a skin, stripped to the waist. Then a man tore off a bit of his denim parka, wrapped it about the blade, threw himself down upon his face, muttered something, then after a single thrust it was all over."

"*Hmmmm!*" gasped the astonished seaman, and with that he cast a doubtful glance at Madison, but decided from the grave expression upon the captain's face, he was telling a matter of fact experience.

CEMALCROIT and old Mashlugi boarded the schooner shortly thereafter. Yes, they had a goodly supply of furs and some fine ivory. All of which was stored near by. They hinted at Russian sable, various kinds of fox-pelts and the skins of other fur-bearing animals of the Far North—all in prime condition.

In turn Madison mentioned the varied articles of trade he had brought, not forgetting to play up a "knocked-down" house suitable for the residence of a chief. The latter's eyes glistened, and Madison was hopeful until they discussed terms. The chief was firm in his stand, even though his prices were impossible.

Madison shook his head.

"No, chief," he told him in the native dialect. "You want too much. I can't do business. You know me from the business we have done in the past. I have always been just."

The chief acknowledged the justice of previous transactions, but held out for his price, and eventually stepped into his skin-boat and was paddled ashore.

"Did you notice Mashlugi's mucklucks?" queried the mate.

"I did, now that you mention it," replied Madison, "and I meant to ask him about them."

The captain seemed to be considering for a moment, then added:

"I wonder if he'd trade them. If I could only find the reason for his peculiar style, then get the mucklucks, they'd bring a good price from a collecter of curios. I'm going ashore," he added with decision.

The mucklucks worn by Mashlugi were similar in every respect to those worn by the other members of his tribe save one. They were made of skin and reached to the knees, but on the outside of each had been sewn a second muckluck. This part was small, about four inches in length, and of proportional width, but from toe to top was an exact counterpart of those worn by Mashlugi, even to thongs for lacing them.

As they were sewed along the top, leaving the bottoms to dangle, it was apparent they were never fashioned for human foot. In all his experience Madison had never seen anything like it, and knowing a good bit about the Siberian native and his superstitions, he was interested in an explanation.

"What're the little mucklucks for, Mashlugi?" inquired Madison in the dialect, after the usual greetings had been exchanged.

Mashlugi appeared to consider the question, then concluding that it was a proper query, gravely explained in detail.

"A devil come a long time ago, and with him come sickness. And fearing the devil, the walrus no longer come down and there was famine."

Then followed an account of the suffering and death that followed. Madison gathered that there was a doubt about that time of Mashlugi's skill as a medicine-man, and that he had been hard put to retain his position. Eventually the sewing of the smaller mucklucks on to his own had solved his problem.

"And now," he concluded, "the devil's feet are in the small mucklucks and where-ever Mashlugi goes the devil also goes, and thus it is Mashlugi always controls the devil. Great prosperity is ours. Much happiness. Many walrus and furs."

"Quite an idea, Mashlugi, but what good will all the furs do you, unless you trade with me?"

Mashlugi intimated the fault lay with Madison.

"How much you want for the mucklucks?"

Mashlugi shook his head, and stated in firm tones they were not for sale.

"All right then," pursued Madison. "Get your wife to make me a pair."

"No!"

"Get some woman to make me a pair."

"No!" replied Mashlugi with some little heat. "No woman, no man, anywhere will make mucklucks like them."

"Aw, go on with you," smiled Madison cheerfully. "When I get back to Nome I'll get some of the natives there to make me a pair."

To his surprize Mashlugi became so furious that he was moved to reply in English. He whipped out a vicious-looking knife which he pressed against Madison's stomach, and Madison, never one to interrupt when a gentleman was expressing himself, made no move to defend himself nor draw the automatic at his side, but waited for Mashlugi to speak.

"I go Nome!" he snarled, "find you with mucklucks—I kill like this!"

And he pressed the knife's point a bit harder against Madison's stomach, then returned it to its sheath, then calmly waited for Madison's reply, which also came in English.

"You try to kill me with knife—" and the automatic came into his hand— "and I'll kill you like this."

And he thrust the pistol's muzzle into Mashlugi's stomach, then returned it to the holster, and Mashlugi, also being a gentleman, made no move to interrupt.

Having arrived at a mutual understanding, each waited for the other's next move. Mashlugi finally broke the silence and explained at length that he was inclined to grant Madison permission to have a similar pair of mucklucks made in Nome, providing the latter would pay as a sort of royalty one box of cartridges. While Madison had no intention whatever of having a similar pair made in Nome, the affair had progressed to a point that an agreement was necessary to retain Mashlugi's confidence.

He admitted that because of Mashlugi's great discovery he was entitled to some royalty, but not of the value of a box of cartridges, and offered a pound of tea, which was accepted.

"Black Pete will be along in a few days, Mashlugi," warned Madison as he took his departure. "You had better keep your furs and ivory well hidden. I'll be back in a few weeks and if—" he said significantly —"I've anything left maybe we can trade."

Mashlugi and the chief watched the *Mary* as she disappeared northward and for the first time they doubted their wisdom in holding out for their price. Perhaps the gossip the chief had heard at Nome about the high prices furs were bringing in that mysterious country spoken of as "the States" was untrue. Nor did the news that a second trader was on his way cheer them up to any marked degree, for that trader was Black Pete and they knew him and his methods to their sorrow.

And so in a few days Black Pete came, and he began his bargaining by offering them whisky, but the wily Mashlugi was not to be caught in any such trap and throughout it all, though he glanced longingly at the whisky, he refused to drink.

At first Black Pete pleaded when he heard their price, then he swore and jeered and finally his eyes fell on Mashlugi's mucklucks. Like Madison, he inquired the reason back of the unusual design. He was reluctantly informed.

"A devil, eh? Huh! You fellows are bigger —— fools than the South Sea islanders."

Having expressed his opinion, Black Pete sailed northward, following along in the *Mary's* wake.

"If I was sure I could find their cache," he snarled to his mate, "I'd helped myself. Imagine that old fool Mashlugi believing he was packing the devil around with him in them mucklucks. We ought to learn 'em a lesson on trading and would have but for that —— Madison. Well, he didn't get the stuff either. Maybe he'll be willing to listen to reason next time we meet."

PETE trailed Madison as far into the ice as he dared, then turned back. Natives informed him that his rival had decided to make a dash to a remote village many miles to the northwestward. They expressed the opinion that the schooner would probably be caught in the ice and held for the Winter. Pete knew Madison had nearly two years' provisions aboard for just such an emergency, and within his evil brain was born an idea.

He abruptly headed southward and forced his schooner at top speed until once more he was anchored off Mashlugi's village. With the greatest display of friendliness he sent presents ashore to Mashlugi and the chief. His own dory returned, was hoisted aboard and Black Pete waited. Sooner or later he knew a skin-boat would put off from shore. If he was playing in big luck, Mashlugi himself would be aboard.

Shortly thereafter a bidarka put out from the village. Under the skilful manipulation of its crew, the skin-craft was soon alongside. Mashlugi himself climbed gravely aboard the schooner.

In his arms he bore a present, which Pete accepted. No sooner had he turned the gift over to a seaman than he leaped upon the amazed native and threw him to the deck. Pinioning his arms and shoulders to the plank, he grinned cruelly at the medicine-man while he shouted his orders at the mate.

"Pull off the mucklucks and be quick! Here you—" to a seaman—"watch that bidarka!"

With no little glee, the mate removed Mashlugi's mucklucks, despite the angry protests and violent struggles of the victim.

"Now search him for a knife," Black Pete directed.

The search was productive of results and both a knife and revolver of rather ancient design were removed. Disarmed and indignant beyond words, Mashlugi leaped to his feet and glared. For a moment he contemplated an attack regardless of the other's superior strength. Nothing would have suited Black Pete better than to crash his mighty fist into the angry face before him.

"Now listen to me, Mashlugi," he snarled. "I don't want your —— mucklucks, but I do want them pelts and that ivory you've got hidden away. We'll pull out from shore so some of your misguided hunters don't try to pick us off with rifles, and there we'll lay to. When you deliver your stuff, you'll get your mucklucks back —not before. And if you don't come through, we'll pull out for Nome, and your mucklucks go with us."

Mashlugi did not understand quite all that was being said, but he grasped Black Pete's proposition and with a mixture of bewilderment and rage at the unexpected turn his friendly call had taken, he stepped into his bidarka and was paddled ashore.

A number of natives were on the beach the instant the craft grounded and a few seconds later the entire tribe surrounded the medicine-man. A great uproar arose, several young men springing to their skin-boats, only to be restrained with difficulty by the chief. Then the men apparently went into council. The younger men were keen for an attack upon the schooner, but the wiser heads pointed out that the white men were armed with guns and would quickly sink the skin-boats long before they could reach the schooner.

On the other hand it was self-evident that without the mucklucks, Mashlugi could no longer guarantee immunity from disease and famine. Even now the devil was doubtless free and gathering his forces for an attack.

Apparently they must submit and deliver the fruits of many months' hard labor, trusting that the white men at Nome would eventually give them justice, but it hurt their pride to submit so tamely to the outrage and so the debate continued.

In the mean time Black Pete had proceeded some two miles from the village and there he calmly waited, while he observed proceedings ashore through binoculars. He smiled a bit grimly at the eloquent gestures of the hotheads and half-hoped they would attack. Incidentally he was highly pleased with himself. It had been a brilliant idea, quite worthy of some of his affairs in the South Seas and it seemed good once more to hold the whip-hand. Of course Madison would hear of it, because as Pete told his mate, "The fool will stop on the way back in hopes the tribe will be ready to do business—unless he gets caught in the ice."

Pete had a fair idea of the outburst that would follow inasmuch as Madison was strictly opposed to such tactics. Perhaps they would meet some time. When that happened Pete guessed he should be prepared for 'most anything and so resolved.

WELL versed in ice-lore, Madison soon realized that his chances of reaching the village were as remote as the locality itself. Below decks he had stowed several bales of pelts and some ivory that he had picked up at the different villages, but the schooner-load he had dreamed of was far from a reality. Old Mashlugi had been his best bet when he had sailed for the arctic, and the old fellow had failed to respond.

"A half-loaf is better than no loaf," he grumbled as he picked up familiar landmarks on the homeward-bound voyage. "But just the same I'll drop in on the old —— and see if he realizes yet that it is not as easy to profiteer in the arctic as it is in the States."

His stanch schooner had barely nosed about the cape when he noted something amiss. Lying some distance offshore was the *Cleo* and a few minutes after the *Mary* hove in sight, the *Cleo* began a hurried retreat. At the same time a bidarka put out from the beach, and never in native races had Madison seen such frantic paddling. His glasses swept from the schooner to the approaching skin-boat and then back to the beach. Here was excitement of the highest degree.

"I think," remarked Madison calmly, "that something has happened not strictly in order. If such is the case, I think something more is going to happen. Just for preparedness' sake you might break out a few rifles and pistols. We may need 'em, considering that friend Pete is a bit careless with such things when he finds himself in a box."

The mate grinned and departed. It looked to him very much as if the long expected and discussed "meeting" between Madison and Black Pete was about to take place—attended possibly with fireworks.

Madison brought his schooner to a standstill and permitted the two natives to board. Then hoisting their light craft to the deck, he continued on at full speed. Old Mashlugi himself was chattering excitedly almost before he reached the deck and the chatter continued, with many a fierce gesture, until he reached Madison—then it increased. Despite a rather broad knowledge of the dialect, Madison found himself unable to catch the cause of the outburst. And then he knew. A glance at Mashlugi's feet and limbs, barren of mucklucks, was sufficient—even eloquent.

"Who took 'em?" he demanded. "Now take it easy, Mashlugi, and it'll all come out right. I'll get your mucklucks back for you!"

Mashlugi nodded vigorously, indicating he expected Madison would do that very thing. In fact he seemed to consider the deed as good as done and calmed down sufficiently to tell a fairly connected account of the outrage.

The chase that followed was long and stern. Madison had more speed—that he knew—but the *Cleo* had a good lead and had increased it when Madison had slowed down for the bidarka. Presently the Siberian coast-line slipped down below the horizon and the two schooners were alone with the ice and the black waters of the arctic.

The *Mary's* bow was nosing past the *Cleo's* stern too close for comfort when Black Pete broke a silence, previously unbroken save by the rush of water about the vessels' bows and the rumble of the motors below decks.

"Keep off, I warn you, keep away!" he shouted through his cupped hands.

"Hand over those mucklucks!" retorted Madison.

A crafty expression flashed over Pete's face for an instant. They might settle the affair with arms, with which both craft were plentifully supplied, but there was too much chance of his receiving a punctured skin in such an argument to suit Pete. It was self-evident that Madison could not board the *Cleo* in a small boat so long as she remained under way, and even if he could the odds would be against him.

If he had nerve enough Madison might even leap aboard the *Cleo* himself, but that would require skilful maneuvering and a desperate leap when the two vessels came together. If he was foolhardy enough to attempt such a feat, Pete and his crew would make short work of the man.

All of these things Pete considered, then with a shout of defiance he picked up the mucklucks and held them aloft.

"Come and get 'em, Madison!" he cried tauntingly.

Without replying, Madison turned to his mate.

"Put her alongside and keep her there. Watch his crew. No gun-play unless they start it!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" responded the mate and he took the wheel himself.

Madison ran lightly to the fo'csle-head of his schooner, then stood waiting. His eyes never left the other craft for an instant as the bow of his own crawled a foot at a time from stern to main-mast, from main-mast to foremast of the *Cleo*. If Pete saw the anchor and its three-fathom of chain at Madison's feet, he did not notice. All he saw was the man, and he gazed like one fascinated at the unexpected acceptance of his challenge.

Suddenly the bow of the schooner surged toward the *Cleo's* beam.

"Good ——, man!" Pete shouted hoarsely. "You'll run us down!"

And he braced himself for the impending crash. It came an instant later as a bow constructed for ice-bucking hurled itself against a hull of the same construction. To his astonishment Pete saw Madison stoop and lift the anchor from the deck—a moment's pause and he brought it to his chest, then his head, then with a final supreme effort, while his face contorted from the pain of his effort, he brought it to arms' length above.

Both crews looked on with amazement and in the strange silence, but one word was spoken. It came from Mashlugi in his native tongue and it seemed to grate, despite the admiration in the tone. Half-staggering, Madison pitched forward and hurled the anchor aboard the *Cleo*—its fluke grappling and holding the craft together.

And then the spell was broken— it came when Madison leaped aboard, his great chest rising and falling from the strain of his exertions, his eyes upon his enemy. A sailor rushed him from behind. He shook him off, turned to meet the man's second rush. His great arm, the muscles as taut as whipcords from the strain of his clenched fist, shot upward, brushed through the other's guard and crashed flush on his jaw. The man's head snapped backward as his body was lifted clear of the deck. When he fell, his shoulders struck first and he lay motionless.

From the *Mary* came the sharp command of the mate. He was gazing down the sights of a rifle, the muzzle of which was pointed at Black Pete. With a snarl of rage Pete dropped the pistol and knife he carried and with the fury of the trapped animal leaped to the attack. Instinctively the *Cleo's* crew fell back. Perhaps it was the row of hopeful faces lining the *Mary's* rail, ready to spring to the aid of their skipper at the first sign of foul play, that held them back—again, perhaps their affection for Black Pete was none too deep.

TRICKS he had learned in a hundred ports were brought into play by Pete in his desperation. He had clinched with Madison, only to fight himself clear—heartily sick of the fierceness of his opponent's in-fighting. Blows that would have felled an ox sent both men to their knees only to rise again and continue the fight. The minutes slipped by with no hint of weakness on the part of either.

Again they clinched, and this time Pete gasped out an exclamation of joy, as he secured the hold he sought. Madison shot over his back, crashing to the deck upon his head and shoulders. A half-cheer went up from the *Cleo's* crew as Black Pete, his swarthy face darker than ever from the rage that gripped him, leaped forward to finish Madison with his boot-heels. Once, twice the heels fell while Madison endured the excruciating agony and fought for his senses. He rolled over, his great arms partly shielding his body, and again came the heels. Madison stifled a groan and gripped the other's boots, bringing him violently to the deck. And from the ensuing rough and tumble each emerged nearly stripped of clothing and red from the blood of his own wounds and those of his opponent.

It was a strong man's fight with a strong man's climax. Beaten the length and breadth of his own deck, Black Pete backed against the cabin door, the fear of impending defeat gleaming in his eyes that but a moment before were glaring in hate. The bruised and fighting thing before him was not a man, even though built like one.

He was super-human—a machine of bone and muscle, without a brain, for a man has a brain and knows when he is defeated. The reeling mountain before him did not know when he was whipped and so he continued. No man before had ever felt the imprint of Black Pete's boots and then boasted of victory and now——

Black Pete had lived to see a man fight off his death-dealing boot-heels and come back for more, and now he was making his last stand against his own cabin door. What would those in the South Seas say when they heard?

And then it came—a fist that seemed to have the driving force of a glacier back of it, but the speed of a bullet. The flesh across the knuckles split to the bone from the impact. The back of Black Pete's head splintered the cabin door as it snapped backward from the blow. For an instant his body seemed pinned to the door, then the door burst open and Black Pete vanished within.

Half in fear, the *Cleo's* crew fell back, little realizing the man who reeled drunkenly about had gathered his last ounce of strength to vanquish his foe. The weakest man among them could have taken Madison's measure at that moment, but no hand was lifted; they only gazed in speechless awe.

He wandered about the deck a moment, his brain dead, his body alone carrying on, then he seemed to realize he had won. There was no trace of exultation upon his face; rather, it was an expression of satisfaction in a duty performed.

On the deck lay the mucklucks where Pete carelessly tossed them after shaking them defiantly at Madison. He picked them up, regarded them a bit grimly, then tossed them aboard his schooner where Mashlugi with a cry of joy fairly pounced upon his strange footgear. Madison mounted the *Cleo's* rail, then leaping aboard his own schooner, turned and faced the crew of the other.

"Tell Pete," he began, then paused, "tell him nothing! He should take a hint! Get that anchor back aboard the *Mary!*"

They jumped to obey as Madison vanished into the cabin of his schooner.

Outside the cabin door Mashlugi hovered. His precious mucklucks once more adorned his none too cleanly feet. His stolid face fairly glowed from the depth of his gratitude and affection. He desperately wanted to do something to show his appreciation.

When Madison again appeared, the *Mary* was just approaching the village, from which skin-boats were already swarming. So far as nature would permit, he had removed the traces of battle, but in appearance he was still far from the Madison of a few hours before. Mashlugi rushed up, his lips flowing with his words of gratitude.

"And for me you did all that—beat the terrible Black Pete!" he exclaimed.

"No, Mashlugi, not for you, but for all white traders who play square—a matter of principle! You probably don't know what that is, except in your native way."

But Mashlugi proved that he did know on the following day, when several of the largest skin-boats, capable of carrying several tons of freight, began putting out from the shore, laden with furs and ivory of a quality well-calculated to cause a trader to weep from pure joy.

Mashlugi explained that the entire lot was a present from the tribe—a gift of appreciation for the invaluable service rendered; that when the *Mary* arrived they were on the point of complying with Black Pete's demand in order to save the precious mucklucks and the prosperity and happiness represented by them.

Madison listened, then shook his head.

"No, Mashlugi, I don't do business that way. I refuse to take advantage of your gratitude, but renew my previous offer."

Mashlugi replied at length, then turned and barked an order at the waiting craft. At the same moment Madison shouted an order in English:

"Break out our stuff, boys, and help get it over the side. Better get that knocked-down house out first—the chief wants it."

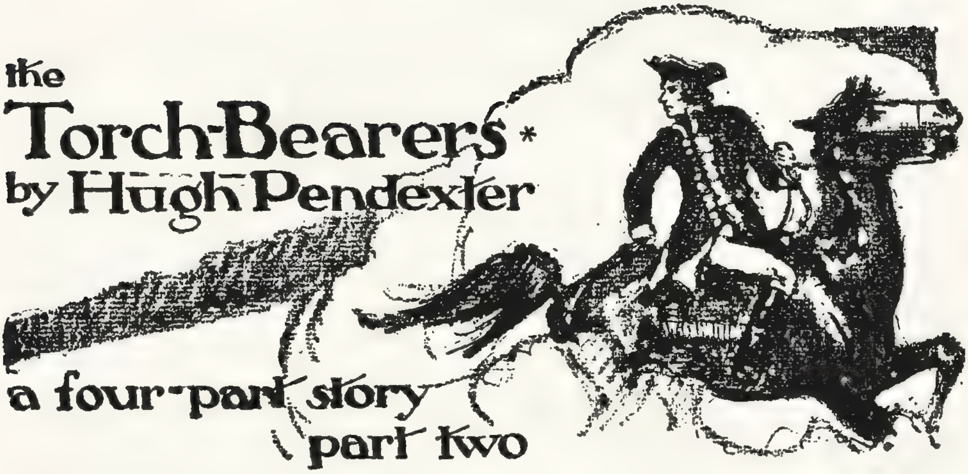
And with things progressing nicely, Mashlugi stepped into his bidarka and was paddled ashore. There were certain things to be done, such as going to the mat with the devil, now that he had him where he wanted him—with his feet secure in the precious mucklucks.

the Torch-Bearers*

by Hugh Pendexter

a four-part story

part two



Author of "The Floating Frontier," "The Road to El Dorado," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

THE "Swamp-Fox," General Marion, was baffling the British troops in South Carolina during the doubtful days of the Revolution. I, James Lance, was sent by my uncle David Macson to take money to our kinsmen the Macsons of the backwoods. Uncle David was a Tory and our kinsmen rebels. I was neutral.

Uncle David got me a pass through the British lines. In the British camp I came upon soldiers preparing to whip a half-witted youth. The victim was a native of the woods, and I thought of a plan to use him on my mission to my kinsmen.

"Let me have the boy as a guide," I demanded, and after much wrangling the officer in command permitted the boy to go with me.

The half-wit guided me to the cabin of Ellis Ambros, an old Tory. There we met four of Ganner's "Regulators," a lawless mounted band hostile to both rebels and loyalists. In a skirmish Ambros in the cabin and I outside killed three and the other galloped away. My half-wit guide disappeared after the fight.

Ambros directed me to the cabin of Angus Macson. There I met Big Simon, Angus' boorish son, and my pretty cousin, Elsie Macson. They all regarded me suspiciously and expressed their contempt of Uncle David. They were disgusted at my neutrality in the struggle between Whig and Tory. Big Simon and I even had a fist-fight.

They accepted the money and put me up grudgingly for the night. In the morning I rode away with my pretty cousin Elsie as my guide.

CHAPTER IV

SOME COUSINLY FAVORS

ELSIE MACSON would talk none with me as we rode down the creek. She had called me "Cousin James" when we started, and this promised much. Had big Simon been my guide I should have been uneasy as to my destination. I went with her gladly, believing no ill could happen to me. Several times I endeavored to make her talk but, always riding in the lead, she would give her tacky the timber and gallop away as if wishing to leave me behind. It was not until we had passed the ford with the flat stones and were nearing the junction of the creek with the Pedee that she addressed me.

"You won't mind," she said, allowing me to ride beside her. She was removing a kerchief from her hair. I did not understand until she leaned toward me and deftly bandaged my eyes. My last glimpse was of her sober face and the creek choked with river-drift beyond.

"Then I am as dangerous as that!" I cried.

"It's orders. I'll guide your horse."

We advanced in silence which was only broken by occasional stirrings in the woods on our right. Sometimes she spoke in a low voice as if addressing some one, and I assumed we were passing videttes. We splashed into the water and I felt it against my boots; then we were on land again, passing through canebrake. After quitting the cane, the way ascended sharply and had many a turn and twist. At last I knew men were about me for I heard the low murmur of their voices. The girl directed—

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"You may dismount and uncover."

I did so and found we were in a wide, deep hollow which was fringed with huge pines and cypress. Scattered among the trees, but all at some distance from us, were small groups of men. There were boys and there were men with hair as white as Angus Macson's. Some were black men. Deeper among the trees smoldering fires sent up smokes which blended with the blue-black of the pines.

Then I beheld General Marion. He had escaped my notice at first as he was reclining on the moss under a tree. He seemed much thinner than when I saw him last at Dorchester, and his slight physique was the more noticeable because of the brawny build of his men. His eyes had changed none, however, and they darted sharp glances as the girl motioned me to approach him.

He wore a short jacket, which originally had been red, but was now much begrimed by hard usage. His leather cap was of the Second Regiment and boasted a tarnished silver crescent on which was engraved the motto, "Liberty or Death." At his side was a small cut-and-thrust sword of the Second Regiment, as he cared little for the longer and more murderous blades commonly used. As I walked toward him he nimbly rose to his feet and while I was deciding his expression was morose, his visage became amiable and he greeted me:

"James Lance, fresh from Charleston, distantly related to the Macsons of this neighborhood, I believe. I knew your uncle David Macson."

"And I remember you, general. I've seen you often in Charleston, also at Dorchester when you were commandant there. Doubtless you know my Uncle David is something of a Tory."

"Every man according to his lights," he was agreeable enough to reply.

Then sitting, he motioned me to take the same liberty for he never was a stickler for military smartness in manners. I glanced about for Elsie but she was gone.

"She'll be ready when she is needed," he assured me. "Like uncle like nephew, I take it."

"You may hang me for a Tory, but I'm neither that nor a Whig. I'm neutral," I said.

His thin lips curved whimsically as he said:

"It isn't worth the bother to hang a neutral. And you may not believe it, but we do not hang even Tories. If some of his Majesty's officers persist in their abuse of our patriots we may string up some of them, but not native Tories. We must live with them for neighbors after this is over."

I remained silent as there seemed to be nothing for me to say, but I thought his speech very moderate, remembering how his nephew, Gabriel Marion, had been captured and hanged. After a few moments he said:

"You bring me money?"

I unfastened the belt and presented it, explaining:

"I brought it to Angus Macson. He sends it to you."

"It's like him. He's a sound man," mused the general, opening the belt and counting the money. "Forty pounds. Come! That's excellent. I've had to give quite a lot of due-bills, and hard money means much to us. Am I to understand you don't like the notion of this money coming into my hands?"

"Not a bit!" I hastily declared. "I fancy Uncle David knew where it would go to once it was handed over to Angus Macson."

"Not such a bad Tory," he murmured. "I have known him for some years. He responds to his surroundings. But how about you being neither flesh, fowl, nor good fish?"

He put it kindly, as if curious to understand a phenomenon, and I found my constraint ebbing. In a blundering fashion I tried to paint a picture of my life and hopes, of the things which turned me first one way, then t'other. He listened patiently; nay, I believed I could read sympathy in his dark face. When I finished he pointed to a boy across the hollow and said:

"He's only fifteen but he's found himself. You're eighteen and haven't found yourself. You will some time, I know. You'll eat with me and then go."

"Then this is all? I'm not to be detained?"

"Why should you be kept here?" he countered with a ghost of a smile playing about the firm mouth. "The money is very welcome, but you're no good to me as a neutral. I'm glad you're not a Tory as I haven't any men to spare guarding prisoners."

It was rather disagreeable, this being informed I was too insignificant to be bothered with. It was all very different from what I had expected after my cold reception at the

Macson cabin. Big Simon even had dignified me by dubbing me a spy. I felt impelled to confess—

"I came through on a British pass."

"It would be necessary," he agreed. With a flash of interest he asked: "Have you that pass with you? No, no! I mustn't ask that. You'll need it to get back. Here comes Oscar with our dinner."

His negro cook placed between us a wide strip of clean bark on which was heaped some very lean beef, freshly killed, and some sweet potatoes. We used our knives and fingers. There was a mug for each, however, only the drink was a crock of water. General Marion added a dash of vinegar to his mug and offered me some, but I did not relish it. After the first mouthful of beef I gazed about and he read my wants and regretted:

"I'm very sorry, but we have no salt. It's hard come by. When we capture a supply we parcel it out among good Whig families, a bushel to each cabin. You'll be going back direct to Charleston or to Angus Macson's cabin?"

"Direct to Charleston—I don't think I would be welcome at Macson's."

"He's a good patriot. His boys have done good work, too. I'm expecting them to join me soon. You'd best strike for Georgetown. The British post there will honor your pass. The Tories on the Pedee and Lynch Creek might not be gentle with you, especially if you told them you were a neutral. If any of the irregular bodies of men came up with you they'd murder you for your coat, even though you were the Prince of Wales."

"I must go back as I came. I hid my papers under a tree some distance up the creek."

He nodded and fell to brooding over something. Then he asked—

"Why did your uncle send this money to the Macsons?"

The question came like the stab of a sword, searching out the only vital part of the whole business.

Without any hesitation I answered:

"You whipped Gainey and Barfield. Uncle David holds that his Majesty's troops must win during this—the worst year of the war from your point of view—or lose the fight."

Marion's face was transfigured and he gently smote his hands together and softly exclaimed:

"Leave it to a merchant to read the truth in a trade or in a fight. I can almost forgive him for being a Tory for his belief. For mark you, young man, neither king nor Tory can whip us this year or next."

He raised his fingers to his lips and gave the peculiar signal the half-wit had sounded in alarming Ganner's "Regulators."

A tall angular man came toward us, leading a horse. General Marion said to me:

"I regret you can't go to Georgetown. This man will guide you."

I had expected Elsie Macson and my disappointment was keen.

"I must go the way I came. I have no choice."

"When we meet again I hope you will have found yourself—on the right side. Good-by."

To my guide:

"You will keep with him so long as he needs you. And no blindfolding."

AS I rode off behind my guide I had an opportunity to observe something of the island outside of the camp in the hollow. The place was very inaccessible. The higher portions were heavily wooded while the lowlands were smothered in river-swamp and canebrake. Where there had been well-defined paths the patriots' axes had felled trees and made them impassable. At dozens of points a handful of riflemen could have stood off half a regiment.

There were quite a few cattle grazing in the openings and a greater number were running half-wild in the more remote sections, my guide informed me. I also saw several patches of maize being tended by wounded men. My guide seemed a simple soul and kept looking back at me and indulged in much chuckling. This irritated me until I learned it was meant for homage.

Among other things he said:

"Gineral will wallop 'em like a rattler swallerin' a catbird! Lordy, but ain't we gone cold an' hungry! Gineral lost his blanket when camp caught fire. Went nearly a year without one. An' hungry! Many a time we had to wait till some one could knock over a squirrel or find a terrapin in the swamp. But that's all ended now the gentry has begun fetchin' hard money to him. We git muskets an' bayonets from the Britishers, even when they think they've well scouted us an' there ain't a man-jack of us within miles of 'em. But real money is scurce as mercy in ——. By jing, mister! The sight of your gay coat put more fightin' heart into us boys then a bar'l of cartouche-boxes would. Shows the gentry's comin' in! Gentry's comin' in! Comin' in!"

He made a chant of it, all the time fawning upon me with his backward glances.

"I've done no fighting," I told him.

He grinned knowingly and held up his long rifle at arm's length and said:

"Of course not! Leave the fightin' to us that's lived rough an' fared rougher! *We'll* do the fightin'. By Christmus; but we're used to tough knocks. All we ask of you folks is to show your colors an' fetch in the hard money. We'll do the fightin' an' git busted up. We ain't got nary a doctor-man to plug up holes neither. Seen one of our men a year ago bleed to death from a busted vein that a doctor-man could 'a' fixed in a jiffy. That's a master fine coat you're wearin'."

"And that's a business-looking sword you're wearing," I replied.

He flourished it proudly, a long, murderous-shaped blade, heavy almost as a sledge-hammer, and he boasted:

"Made by a smith from a saw took out of a sawmill. Gineral had us fetch in all the saws we could git our paws on an' had 'em made into these fellers."

When we passed the choked area of the creek, where the girl had slipped the covering over my eyes, my guide was still reciting the great benefits my visit to Marion would work the patriot cause. I pitied him and yet admired his enthusiasm. I was ashamed that his praise should be so unworthily bestowed, and I could appreciate how sweet his words must sound to one who deserved them. Finally I called a halt and told him:

"I know where I am now. You needn't come any farther."

He hesitated and grinned sheepishly and insisted:

"If there's to be any whang-doodles I'm mighty spry with sword or gun. All you do is to keep that coat furbished up bright an' smart, an' leave it to me to find the colors of their guts."

He was an amazing individual. He looked on warfare as a most prosaic sort of task and would approach it, seemingly, without any emotion. It was a quality I must ever envy, such a total disregard for physical danger. It was with difficulty that I got rid of him, but at last he turned back and I rode on and endeavored to decide my course of action. The girl's desertion of me was an unmistakable hint that I was not wanted at her father's cabin. While I could not fight down my desire to see her again I did vanquish the foolish impulse to revisit old Angus and run the risk of another fight with his brute of a son. On reaching the ford I dismounted and recovered my passes from the foot of the tree and crossed over to the opposite bank.

The creek was my Rubicon. When I turned my back to it I cast the Macsons out of my life. My chances of seeing the girl again were most remote, for I would never, I vowed, visit the north side of the creek again. One advantage of living in South Carolina in 1780 was the variety of mental impulses one received. Impulse of terror, of amazement, of joyous expectations. A man could not be committed indefinitely to one trend of thought. Sorrow did not have time to eat the heart out; great joy was too fleeting to grow stale. And I and my gloomy thoughts were not far advanced on the road to Ellis Ambros' cabin before my meditations took wings and I was backing my horse into the bushes while I investigated a pounding of hoofs close behind me.

It was Elsie Macson's horse but the rider, to my astonishment, was the half-wit, Runty. He rode perched well forward on the horse's withers like the jockeys on the New Market Course, and he was giving the poor brute the timber at every stride. Plunging from the bushes, I swung my mount across the narrow road and compelled the young devil to rein in.

He tried to get by me, but I had him by the nape of the neck and the two horses crowded together while I fiercely demanded what he meant by stealing the animal.

"Fool! Let me go!" he cried in a shrill voice, striving to strike the horse with a switch. I yanked the switch from his hand, and being in no mood for his nonsense I shook him till he nearly fell from the saddle. And as I yanked him back and forth his ragged hat slipped over one ear and unsuspected quantities of hair came tumbling down his neck and over my arms. The half-wit look vanished from his face and in its place was the face which reminded me of my mother's portrait.

"Good ——! Elsie Macson!" I hoarsely cried.

"You've killed me, for I'll kill myself before they shall catch me," she panted. "You've spoiled it for me. Spoiled my life! I'd gladly give it for the States. You make me throw it away."

"Some one is after you?"

She laughed hysterically and glanced back toward the creek. Now I could hear the commotion of horses coming at full gallop.

"They're Tories, not Regulators," she muttered. "There's more of them along the creek than there is of Marion's men; only they're stupid."

I sent both horses forward at a gallop, my mind still bewildered at the discovery that my fair cousin and the half-witted Runty were one and the same. I stared incredulously at her, marveling how such sweet features could be masked by an expression of stupidity. Accompanying this wonderment was the realization that I had treated her harshly. I found myself mumbling—

"I didn't guess—when I shook you——"

"You shook me as the foolish boy," she broke in. "That doesn't matter. But if they catch me now——"

"Do they know you?" I cried.

"No. They're fresh from North Carolina. I was scouting them when they saw me and gave chase. That's why I left the island and left some one else to guide you. One of Marion's men reported them—my horse is about played out, poor beast!"

"You can have mine if it comes to a race," I encouraged. "But there's another way. It will work. Fix your hair. You're a young man, but no simpleton. I'll get you clear."

As I talked I fumbled inside my coat.

"Saving me twice is asking too much," she said, yet tucking her superfluous hair beneath her hat and rearranging her leather coat until, with her homespun breeches, she looked to be a prepossessing youth. It was fascinating to behold the change in her mobile face. I had seen it vacant and purposeless, that of the scatterbrain, and I had felt irresistibly attracted by its sweetness as a maid's. Now the softness faded out and lines of reckless daring were stamping it with masculinity.

"Rub some dirt on your face," I directed. "Even when you scowl you make too sweet a boy."

The glance she flashed me was thoroughly feminine, and with lithe ease she swung low from the saddle and scooped up a handful of dirt from the road and smeared some on her cheeks and fair forehead. I prayed this move would effectually disguise her, but my eyes could see nothing but prettiness.

"Your plan?" she demanded with a backward glance that assured her the enemy was not yet in sight on the curving road.

I PULLED out my two passes and gave her the one signed by Lord Cornwallis. It read "to pass the bearer." I said:

"That should get you clear of them. Only promise me you'll destroy it when it's served your purpose."

"I'll destroy it, Cousin James," she said. "But leave me now, lad; they'll be in sight in another minute."

"I shall be near at hand," I told her. "And remember to talk like a man."

"Have no fear as to that part of it," she replied in a gruff, masculine voice.

Then I turned my horse into the woods and made my way parallel to the road while the girl pulled her horse down to an easier gait. I could tell when the band burst into view by the outburst of exultant howling. By the clatter of their horses' hoofs I knew their animals were much superior to the poor nag ridden by the girl. Dismounting and tying my horse to a tree, I stole forward to witness the climax of the chase. Elsie had reined in and was calmly awaiting her pursuers. From my position in the bushes I could see the band was led by a man as huge in build as Big Simon and his coat and trappings were gorgeous in the extreme. With a rush and a roar they came up and surrounded her.

As their clamor died down and before their leader could address her she asked in a voice much deepened in tone—

"Who commands here?"

"——! I do!" bellowed the big man. "And, ——! You'll dance on air for the rig you've run us!"

"Not so fast, whoever you are," the girl calmly replied. "If you are rebels I'll appeal to General Marion, who is against hangings, I'm told. If you're for the king I have that with me which talks with authority."

"—— all lousy rebels!" bawled the leader. "Up north it would be worth a lout's life to ask that of Captain Ben Tickridge."

"Down here this counts more than Captain Tickridge," drawled Elsie, exhibiting my pass.

Tickridge grabbed it and scowled heavily as he spelled out Aide-de-camp Money's writing.

"And how do I know his lordship signed this?" he asked.

"You don't," was the insolent reply. "But a ride to the nearest British post will satisfy you."

Tickridge was disgruntled. The pass had had a strong effect on him and I supposed the battle was won when he returned the paper and said, "It seems to be all right." My hopes were dampened when he added, "We seem to be traveling the same direction. We'll ride together for a bit. Where are you bound for?"

"Georgetown," was the unhesitating response. Unfortunate too, I believed, as Georgetown was a scant forty miles away and an advance of only a few miles in that direction would be sure to bring them in touch with some of the numerous bands sent out to protect wagon-trains from capture. Among these details would be officers who would be less easily fooled than the North Carolina partisan.

"That's where we're bound for. We'll ride together," said Tickridge.

"Then you'll ride mighty slow as my nag is blown. I used him up in trying to get away from you. I took you for some of the Snow Island rebels."

"By the sword! I'd like to have a go at them!" boasted Tickridge.

"As easy done as said!" eagerly cried Elsie. "I'm on my way to report, after well scouting them. I can lead you there and we can take them by surprize."

Tickridge frowned and ran his eye over his following. His men were gay in their scarlet coats and dragoon hats. Their muskets were new and fresh from some British depot of arms.

"We'll report in Georgetown first," he told her. "I've heard it's easier to get to that ragmuffin's camp than to leave it."

"If we win we can take our time in getting out. If we lose we'll stay there till the last trump," rejoined the girl.

Tickridge bawled an order and his men formed by twos, with the girl and the captain at the head of the line. How he could mistake her slim form for that of a man's puzzled me exceedingly until I recalled how she had twice fooled me. Wisps of hair fell across her mud-stained face and hid the charming contour of her features. So long as they kept in motion, minimizing conversation, I believed her secret was safe; but did she forget and speak in her natural voice, or clear the stains from her face and allow the dimple to be seen, or gaze through her half-closed lids—as she had done at me—then it would be for me to get her well out of it, or else get us both decently killed by bullets. She had not forgotten I might be near by, for with a careless glance toward my side of the road she said to Tickridge:

"Ahead is the cabin of a notorious Whig. I was to scout the place and see if he is at home. With your men to back me the cabin can be surrounded. If he's there we'll take him to camp."

Now there was but one habitation in our vicinity, that of old Ellis Ambros, the Tory. The girl risked everything on Tickridge's ignorance of the place and the man, due to his recent arrival from the neighboring State. She was trying to tell me that she must escape during the halt at the cabin, and that if I were to aid her it must be then and there. Tickridge gave the word to advance and at a trot the double line began to move. I ran back to my horse and mounted and pushed deeper into the woods. My luck was with me for I struck a cow-path that ran parallel to the road. As I followed it I could catch the jangling of Tory accoutrements, and at times, when the growth thinned out, I was forced to quit the path or wait until the tail of the procession got ahead of me.

The path ended at a small clearing and I was nonplused to observe the open space between me and the cabin. On my left, a quarter of a mile away, was Tickridge and his men riding at a canter while several horsemen galloped ahead down the road, and two struck in across the opening between me and the cabin. Although town-bred, the whole performance—providing any game was in the cabin—impressed me as being useless.

The pounding of hoofs on the road would have warned any occupant of the visitors' coming, and the scouts so clumsily thrown about the place would arrive entirely too late to prevent flight. Of course I knew there was no one at the cabin; but had the fate of the British Empire pivoted on capturing one man there, the throne would have taken a tumble. The maneuvers caused hearty contempt for Tickridge and gave me more confidence. As an advance across the opening was out of the question I commenced a circling movement in the woods which would bring me close to the rear of the cabin without leaving cover.

When I judged I was back of the cabin I quit my horse and proceeded on foot, my two pistols freshly primed, my pulse racing madly under the stimulus of danger. Two of the scouts passed around the cabin with much racket and hastened back to report to Tickridge. He and his men were waiting in the grove between the cabin and the highway. The rear window of the cabin and the open door were in line. I lost no time in pressing my advantage and stole forward and had an excellent view of Tickridge and the girl and the bulk of the horsemen.

"There's no one here," announced one of the men who had forced his horse through the growth back of the cabin.

"Say 'Captain Tickridge' when you speak to me!" roared the officer.

"Yes, sir—Cap'n Tickridge, I mean. The nest is empty."

"Then we'll move on," growled Tickridge.

"But a moment, please, Captain Tickridge," cried the girl; and there was a feminine quality in her voice that made my skin prickle with fear. "I must search the place. There may be papers—lists of names. I must report in full."

Tickridge swore violently and vowed he had no time for such nonsense. He must make Georgetown at all speed. And that some animal cunning still incited him to be suspicious he added that the girl must go with him.

Now she was superb as in a drawling, insolent, and quite masculine voice she said:

"*Must* go with you? —— my blood! but who are you? You say you're for the king. How do I know you're not a —— Whig partisan up to some dirty trick? Where are your papers? Show your commission. A scarlet coat is easier to get than a pass signed by Lord Cornwallis. By the Lord Harry! Think I'm to be turned from doing his lordship's business by every roaring fellow who wears a gay coat? We don't make war in that fashion in South Carolina. And, forsooth! I'm as keen to see you in Georgetown and well proven up to your claims as you are to see me there."

The fellow was flabbergasted. He glared in impotent rage and amazement at her bold words. Some of his men were looking supernaturally grave, as men look who are struggling to suppress laughter. Some sense of prudence, however, remained beneath his boiling anger. The bearer of his lordship's pass had the right of it. Choking back a mouthful of oaths, he hoarsely commanded:

"Sergeant Newt, take four men and our young friend and search the cabin. Make haste."

THE sergeant and his squad dismounted and with Elsie leading the way, made for the cabin. From my position at the back window I watched the five framed in the doorway, with Tickridge's red face in the middle distance. The girl's only chance, so far as I could see, would be to duck through the window and race with me into the woods and ride away with me. The problem was to get this suggestion to her without being detected by her companions.

The five of them entered the cabin, and while I dared not spy on them through the window I could tell by the girl's crisp orders that they were making a thorough search.

"There ain't nothin' here," the sergeant testily insisted.

My heart was in my mouth and I cursed my helplessness. She had made for the cabin and by her woman's cunning had gained it, all in the hope I would be on hand and resourceful enough to prevent her being carried off to Georgetown.

"Wait! There is a puncheon loose. Up with it!" she ordered, her voice vibrating with desperation.

"——! You may be carryin' the King of England's pass, but I don't take no orders 'cept from Cap'n Tickridge," the sergeant insolently answered her.

"Afraid of laming your back," she sneered. "Then I'll do it alone."

Holding my head just below the window and with a pistol drawn I waited. There were a few moments of absolute silence in the cabin, then with crashing abruptness the sergeant was yelling:

"Godfreymighty! A woman!"

There was an exultant shriek in his voice as he screamed—

"Cap'n! Cap'n! This feller's a woman!"

Up went my head and a glance told me how the girl had betrayed herself. She had stooped to lift the puncheon and in doing so had lost her hat, and for a second time that day her marvelous hair had fallen over her shoulders to proclaim her sex. And the accident had brought a rush of blood to her face that no man ever displayed, and which no amount of mud-stains could conceal.

With this first weakness her whole defense went down. Her eyes, heretofore calm and indifferent, were now shrinking because of horrible fears. The slim figure, so sturdy and self-dependent, so deceiving because of its daredevil swagger, was trembling beneath the vulgar gaze of the five men. Rare game, indeed, for Captain Tickridge and his independent command!

Scarcely had the sergeant given the alarm than he seized the girl; not to make sure she should not escape, but because she was a woman. Her hands flew to her belt, but the sergeant hooted derisively and tore them away and threw his arms about her slim waist, while his comrades roared in delight. The girl fought him like a wildcat, bringing more than one curse from between his bearded lips.

The two swung across the floor and close to the window and the whole affair came to a climax almost before the stupefied Tickridge could dismount. The sergeant held her back in his arms and in reprisal for the furious scratches on his face had one hairy paw under her chin and was forcing her head back until it seemed her neck must snap; and he was rejoicing:

"She belongs to me! Rules of war! I caught her——"

Then two things happened. Tickridge's astounded face appeared at the doorway and my clubbed pistol made a dent in the top of the sergeant's head. Tickridge, on witnessing the blow, bleated with fear and leaped away from the door. Had the girl been able to crawl through the window we might have made it, for there were several moments when the four men in the cabin were too paralyzed to move, and outside a general confusion rendered the horsemen helpless. But she had been choked almost to the point of unconsciousness and could only sag back against the log wall and pump for breath.

Running around the cabin, I dashed into a group of men and flung them aside and made for Tickridge, who stood half-crouched, his sword raised in a clumsy fashion, his voice bawling out inarticulate orders.

"What the —— does this racket mean, sir? And who are you that comes raiding through the province of his gracious Majesty?" I hotly demanded.

"We—we caught a woman!" he stammered, so taken by surprize at my appearance and bearing and fierce queries that he forgot I was alone and should have much explaining to do.

"Inside there!" I yelled. "Let that wench come out."

Then to Tickridge, who was beginning to collect his senses and was gazing furtively at the corner of the cabin to locate my men:

"Who commissioned you to catch women when there are —— Whigs to be exterminated? ——'s hounds! Do you think his Majesty plans to win this war with women-chasers?"

Now came the inevitable query and I had braced myself for it even before his shifty eyes reflected his growing confidence, and even before he found the words.

"Who are you to be giving orders here?" he asked.

"Major Wemyss, sirrah!" I haughtily replied; and the girl, now clinging to the door-frame, popped open her mouth and stared at me in amazement, and—yes, it was plain enough to me and gave me a nerve-tingling thrill—with admiration.

Captain Tickridge gave ground, his lips opening and closing like a dying fish's. He managed to remark:

"In those clothes! No sword! No uniform! Never'd dreamed it!"

"There's been too much dreaming here," I retorted. "As to my clothes, blast my life! But how long since his Majesty's officers must consult raw provincials as to what they will wear?"

"God forbid I should question his gracious Majesty's officers," protested Tickridge.

"To what command are you attached?" I asked. "I remember no body of troops with your facings."

"From North Carolina. Independent command until I can reach Georgetown and be assigned."

Then with a return of his rat-like cunning.

"Your troops are near, major? You'll bivouac with us?"

They were dragging out the sergeant now and I turned aside and glanced at his wound to gain time. The girl was quite restored and her soft brown eyes were like liquid fire and they never quit me as I gathered myself for the impending struggle of wits.

"My men are encamped back in the woods. We move to attack Mister Marion and his ragtag bobtails. His Majesty's officers do not accept invitations from inferiors to mess."

Then less haughtily, and more in a condescending voice I added:

"But you may dine with me, if you desire. Half a mile back in the woods. Only you'll need bring some provender. We have —— slim rations, but plenty of brandy. Whether you dine with me or not you can consider yourself attached to my command until we've had a smash at Marion. Order your men to follow this road to Lynch's Creek, allowing no one to pass them. My command follows a cow-path to the creek. We will join forces there. I have a slave to guide me and I'll surprize that —— Swamp-Fox or eat my commission. Now I'll interrogate this woman aside."

Without waiting for Tickridge to reply I stepped inside the cabin, leaving the door open, and motioned Elsie to be seated on a stool. Tickridge stood just outside the door, conscious of his men watching him to observe how my high-handed proceedings affected him. He fidgeted nervously and made several false moves to enter, but was overcome by the provincial Tory's respect for the British officer. It was not until alone with the girl that I dared to draw a free breath.

Only the fact that Tickridge was fresh from North Carolina had permitted my counterfeited personality to pass muster. That he was suspicious that something was wrong was very obvious. My traveling-clothes, with no military earmarks to distinguish me from a civilian, was unheard of. But if he was suspicious, fear also was with him, the fear of a superior officer. Perhaps he was further restrained from giving voice to his doubts because of his conviction that he had me pocketed were I an imposter.

For the moment I had overawed him by my swagger, my thinly veiled contempt for provincial Tories. But let me impersonate Charleston officers as cleverly as I could, I knew my minutes of grace to get clear of the trap were very few. Already I knew some word was being passed through the scattered groups. Then two men separated and rode across the little clearing toward the woods. They were being sent to find the camp of Major Wemyss. At the utmost I would only have until they could penetrate the woods half a mile and return.

I harshly demanded of Elsie if she be a woman. She sat with her back to the door, safe from the espionage of Tickridge, and the tantalizing dimple near the corner of her mouth came and went as she meekly replied in the affirmative. I commenced a rigid cross-examination. She gave me a name, fictitious, and a disjointed story about searching for her mother's cattle, and of not daring to ride except in male garb.

Inwardly I commended her upon the artistry of her recital, nicely balanced on the edge of tears, containing many pathetic repetitions. Then Tickridge thrust his shaggy head in the door and denounced her.

* * *

"THAT'S all a parcel of lies. She carries a pass, signed by his lordship, Earl Cornwallis. She's a —— spy!"

Both the girl and I were nonplused for a few seconds. Both of us had clear forgotten the pass. Her explanation to me was received by Tickridge as a complete confession of her guilt. His beef-red face reeked with triumph. My bearing, I hoped, was interpreted as astonishment. But the girl reacted splendidly. Rising and speaking very calmly, she informed us:

"Major Wemyss, both you and Captain Tickridge have blundered on to something that does not concern you, that you have no business to know, that will advance you none with his lordship now that you do know it in part. I carry his lordship's pass. I am detected in the guise of a man. Do you presume to inquire deeper into my business? For if you do you must ride with me to Charleston, and Captain Tickridge must go with us. Once there, his lordship can satisfy your curiosity."

Her inference was plain. We were to know she was a secret agent for Lord Cornwallis. I hastily declared:

"Blast my vitals, but I'll not steal any crumbs from his lordship's dish! Let this Tickridge go with you to Charleston. I'll have none of it. His lordship's pass is more than enough for me to know."

"Let it be so! I'll go with her!" cried Tickridge.

This left the next move up to me and for my life I could not rally my benumbed wits. If Tickridge would leave his post by the door we two could slip through the window and make a run for it. I was still groping for some expedient when there came a Heaven-sent diversion in the shape of a scattering volley down the road, followed by the rumbling of many horses in flight. They were coming down upon us from the creek.

Tickridge ran back to his men in the grove and began yelling orders. Elsie whispered:

"Thank God! They'll be M'Cottry's Rifles, sent by Marion to sweep the country of the vermin who would have whipped me! Yes, yes. Thank God, indeed! Oh, can't you hear them yelling? They're M'Cottry's Rifles with never a doubt! They flushed the game down by the creek!"

"Even so, but who are they chasing?" I cried. "We have a scant minute! Through the window with you! We'll take to the woods."

"I'll stay! They'll rescue me," she cried.

But already the road was becoming filled with galloping horsemen. Tickridge, with a glimmer of sense, had thrown his men across the way to check the rout.

"I am Captain Benjamin Tickridge, loyal to his Majesty, King George. Who are you?" bawled Tickridge to an officer, who was using the flat of his sword to halt his men.

"Fall in! Fall in! We'll form behind you, captain. I am Captain Harrison. Major Wemyss, of the Sixty-third, is coming close behind me. Ambushed by those cussed backwoodsmen. There comes Major Wemyss now. Fall in, you fools! Captain, send your men forward to clear the bushes on each side of the road."

Tickridge stood as if stunned. He began turning his head toward the cabin as his brain resumed functioning. I slammed the door and picking up the girl, shot her feet first through the window and leaped after her, just as a loud howl of rage proclaimed that Tickridge was seeing through the imposition practised upon him. Seizing the girl's hand, I led her deeper into the cover, while behind rose cheers and oaths and hoarse commands, but not entirely upon our account, for the wholesome popping of M'Cottry's Rifles was sounding nearer and evidencing that it was something more serious than an ambush.

I located my horse and urged her to take him and ride for it. But she would not listen, saying:

"The horse I lost was a sorry brute. I'll circle back to the rear of M'Cottry's men and soon find another. Many a horse is running wild back there. Hark! The firing is beyond the cabin! M'Cottry's men are driving them down the road. There'll be no danger in my making for the creek— You've played the part of a good Whig this day!"

"I saved a young woman from a disagreeable situation. I would have done the same if I had carried the king's commission."

"You ride for Charleston?"

"Yes. Are you sure you will be all right? If not, I will see you home."

She smiled a bit sadly and said:

"I'm thinking our welcome to you wasn't overcordial. You have scant call to visit us again. I go to see General Marion and report on Tickridge's force. I am perfectly safe even now in taking to the road."

"Then it's good-by," I said, climbing heavily into the saddle. "I must make a wide detour to get beyond those fellows."

"Wait. You're forgetting your pass," she said, pulling it from the bosom of her leather coat and handing it to me.

I put it away and for a bit allowed my gaze to rest on the dimple close to the corner of her mouth. Then with a jerk I threw up my head and said—

"Now it's good-by."

"A moment!" She detained me in a voice curiously low and soft.

And she stood at my stirrup, plaiting the horse's mane.

"After all, it is custom even though we be distant cousins," I heard her murmur.

At first I did not understand what she meant. Then her small face was tilted up and the color was suffusing her cheeks, and there was a hint of moisture in her brown eyes. And, God forgive me, I was so blind as not to note until I had completed her embarrassment that she was standing on tiptoe and waiting for a cousinly kiss, such as she had denied to me at our first meeting. I leaned low and placed my arm about her shoulders to cradle her head, and my salute must have contained something beyond the conventional, for I felt her squirm in an attempt to escape.

"Now it must be good-by," I said, my heart most doleful.

She drew back a few paces, the color still rioting through her cheeks till they put the scarlet of his Majesty to shame.

"Yes, Cousin James, it's high time to say good-by," she panted.

With that she leaped into the undergrowth and I had nothing to deter me from starting for Charleston.

CHAPTER V

CAPTAIN GANNER AT HOME

A MAID'S kiss will stir the blood more than all the ardent spirits in the world. After she left me I must have been dazed, otherwise I can not account for my wits becoming muddled until I did not know where I was. In a general way I knew I must bear southeast, but I had little idea of the length of time I had been riding through the woods and clearings, over lonely roads and by ruined cabins. Nor could I estimate how fast I had traveled. It was as if I had gone to sleep after she quit me and was just awaking. The hiatus was considerable, however, as the sun was very low. Of but one thing was I positive; I was ravenously hungry.

Fully aroused, I applied myself to locating a road which would take me to the upper waters of Black River near Kingstree. Not too close to Kingstree, however, for I must have time to compose my mind before meeting any more of his Majesty's officers. I planned to cross the Santee at Muray's Ford, above Laneu's, and strike almost due south to Monk's Corner, where I would take the road to Strawberry.

My only danger-point would be Georgetown on the east, from which Tickridge might be riding. Once in my uncle's home back in Charleston, I did not believe I would be embarrassed. I had come in contact with Captain Tans and had aroused his resentment but he was fresh from Savannah and might not enter the city for weeks. Then there was always the chance he would be killed. Even at the worst I feared him little. I had appropriated his half-witted prisoner to act as my guide.

Lieutenant Chats had a high opinion of my uncle's influence at headquarters, and felt friendly toward me. Old Ambros, my next point of contact, could testify I had done him a service in charging Ganner's men. There was no one, likely to visit the city, who could know of my trip to Snow's Island and my interview with General Marion.

Tickridge, however, was a real menace. Could events hold him in Georgetown, or should his thick head be bashed in, his story of the passes and my impersonation of Major Wemyss would never bob up to bother me. One other peril, although I deemed it slight, was the possibility of meeting officers who did not know me, and who had received word from Wemyss to pick up all strangers garbed as gentlemen. Did this happen I would be in a sorry plight. The nearer I drew to Charleston the less I feared this last possible evil.

Committed to stealth until at least I had passed Muray's Ford, I studied the lonely landscape carefully, but was compelled to admit the country was new to me. The prospects of passing the night in the open without blankets were not alluring as the evening air was very crisp. To obtain shelter I began examining the scattered houses along my way. These were almost invariably in a ruined condition. Of some only the chimneys were standing. Others had no roofs. And in some the oakum stuffing between the logs was burned out leaving the walls looking like the ribs of skeletons. And I was hungry. My two hundred pounds of beef were clamoring for food. Altogether it was a most asinine plight for one pretending to know something of the country to fall into.

The countryside began to fade out, the background of majestic pines becoming opaque masses, while the nearer objects grew vague and uncertain in outline. I had stopped at half a dozen different habitations, only to reject them all, when on my right a light pierced the gathering darkness, thrusting at me like a spear of flame by a growth of black cypress, then vanishing. I turned from the winding road and made toward it, going largely by chance, as the light had shown only for a moment. I groped my way a few hundred feet before it appeared again.

This time it endured for a count of five. It was entirely too powerful for a candle. Nor was it a camp-fire, for its illumination was shut off completely. Thus, elimination told me it must be a roaring blaze in a fireplace, and that the opening and closing of a door had permitted the stabbing rays to escape. That no windows glowed with rosy light could be explained by heavy curtains, the occupants wishing to escape attention.

The country was wild and lonely and there would be but few travelers abroad, and few of these bent on legitimate errands. I could appreciate how women-folks, with their men off to fight with Marion, would feel unsafe and would guard against molestation. I dismounted and proceeded carefully and at last caught a faint murmur of voices.

A few rods deeper into the cypress grove and I was making out a substantial manor house. The absence of outbuildings testified to the torch of the vandal. As I grew more accustomed to the darkness I saw the structure was imposing, running up two full stories, with four huge pillars gracing the entrance. Disliking to alarm women, if they be there alone, yet trusting my being alone would allay their fears, I threw the reins over a stone hitching-post and mounted to the deep veranda. The door was thick and the sound of voices told me nothing. I lifted the knocker, and as it fell with a dull, booming sound there was absolute quiet within. My horse whinnied, and I mechanically began swinging my head about only to have the muzzle of a pistol roughly clapped against my jaw and to stay my investigation. A moment later the door flew open and in the flood of light I beheld three men, each aiming pistols. Back of them were grouped fifteen or twenty rough-looking fellows.

"Git in there!" commanded the man holding the pistol against my head.

The trio on the threshold fell back and I followed them inside. When the pistol was removed from my head one of the three stepped by me and closed the door and shot the bolt.

"Welcome!" boomed an ironical voice.

I was standing in a spacious hall and directly opposite the fireplace. Between me and that was a long table covered with jugs, bottles and decanters. Behind this and on either side of the fireplace were the men, grinning in ferocious merriment as my questioning gaze wandered about. The one assuming the duties of host was perched on one end of the long table, seated with one leg doubled back beneath him, the toe of the other foot barely scraping the floor as he swung it back and forth. He was a short, squat-built fellow with curious corn-colored hair that stood out in all directions as if being disordered by a stiff breeze. A broad livid scar, like a red ribbon, extending from the tip of his chin to the top of his right ear, added to the eccentricity of his appearance.

"I said 'welcome.' Has our fine gentleman nothing to say?" he asked in a mocking voice.

"Why, yes," I replied, advancing to the table. "I'll say I'm most —— chilled by the night air and will twig a tickler of brandy with the company's permission. Only it's gloomy business drinking alone."

The man on the table clapped his hands and guffawed mightily.

"—— your liver, but you talk like a man!" he cried.

And he hopped to the floor and advanced toward me with brisk steps.

"Drink by all means. Then tell us about yourself and why we are thus honored by your gracious presence."

I poured out a neat dram and tossed it off, and informed him—

"I travel on his Majesty's business."

"And travel alone?" he curiously asked, his eyes of a light slate color, darting over me and taking in every detail of my apparel, and lingering on the several rings I wore, as well as the gold chain across my waistcoat.

The truth was quite apparent to me now. These were neither Whigs nor Tories.

"Not entirely alone," I said, seating myself beside him on the table. "Captain Harrison, detached by Major Wemyss, comes close behind me."

I could hear the men behind me stir uneasily at this bit of information. My interrogator straightened up and stared at me steadily. His voice was almost gentle as he said:

"I see. That is very interesting. Would it be bold in me to ask the captain's business so far from the beaten road of the rebels?"

His speech did not belie what I had heard of him. Born of good family, but thoroughly bad from his earliest years of independence, Chace Ganner's mocking ways of speech ran neck and neck with his ferocious brutality to the weak and defenseless. It was an evil nest I had stumbled into, and my wits worked feverishly in seeking a way out. I must temporize. I returned his scrutiny without flinching, and replied:

"I'm here to tell you, Captain Ganner. But these others——"

I indicated the somber groups on both sides of the fireplace and fell to admiring the lace on my cuffs while waiting for him to take the hint and dismiss them.

For nearly a minute he said nothing; then laughingly replied:

"Rather cold to turn the brave fellows out, don't you think? Besides, I have no secrets from my boys."

A murmur of approbation greeted this speech.

"It's all one to me," I assured him, shifting from the table to a chair that I might have the roomful of them before me. "If you can trust them, that's enough. Captain Harrison has heard much of you——"

"And has tried hard enough to get my pelt," said Ganner with a soft laugh.

"And has failed; and that's the reason he seeks you now. It has been believed, until recently, that you have favored the rebels."

"I've cut up several bands of redcoats," he boasted.

"If you hadn't you wouldn't be worth bothering with now," I returned.

Leaning forward and fixing my gaze on his whimsical face and speaking in my most impressive voice, I continued:

"The point is this. His Majesty holds South Carolina in the hollow of his hand. Law and order will be restored. It's for you to say how you will stand when the law comes back to the land. The rebels have long memories and never have loved you."

HE NODDED slowly and I could not decide whether the queer tilt of his lips was his habitual expression, or was making game of me.

"Go on," he invited.

"To put it briefly, Captain Harrison comes to offer you a captaincy in his Majesty's service, provided, of course, that you devote all your energies to confounding the rebels."

"He told you to say that to me?"

"No. I'm saying it to protect myself until he can arrive and do his business in person. Not to mince words I should not visit you unless my errand had a big chance of appealing to you."

"But you're not in the service," he mused, his lids dropping.

"Not in uniform," I smilingly corrected. "It was I who brought his lordship's offer of a commission to you to Captain Harrison, or whomever Major Wemyss detailed for the business. I was to accompany the military agent to you. I happened to arrive ahead of him. Here are my credentials."

And I handed over my Cornwallis pass.

Either my frank explanations or my pass or both made a deep impression on him. He studied the paper thoughtfully, then restored it to me and asked—

"How near is Captain Harrison?"

"I can't say. I rode ahead when he threw out scouts. In the darkness I wandered farther ahead than I had planned. He should be within a mile; very possibly within half a mile. If you could send a couple of men up the road to the north they'll fall in with his scouts or the main body. The word is 'Cornwallis.' "

"How many does he bring with him?"

"Not more than fifty."

"I'd rather do business with Major Wemyss. He's more after my own heart," he mused, slipping from the table and pacing its length with his hands behind his back.

Returning to me, he suddenly clapped both hands on my shoulders and cried out:

"By the gods! You're a brave man! Give me a few hundred such and I'd whip both king's troops and the rebels. Draw up to the table and eat something. You must be hungry. Where's that —— black man?"

A slave popped into the hall from a door at the lower end, his face almost gray from terror, his eyes fairly bulging from his head.

"Food here, you black dog, and be quick!" commanded Ganner.

Then sitting on the table beside me, he admitted:

"I like your proposition. Of course a captaincy isn't anything to offer me. I'm already 'Captain' Ganner. I have no one to give me orders and I could just as well call myself 'General' Ganner. If I accept Harrison's offer there must be some substantial bonus as an appreciation of my services." He paused to chuckle merrily. "A bonus will take the place in part of my pickings. I agree with you that the dance is about over. But here is food."

The negro placed a tray before me and I carved me a piece of ham and a portion of roast fowl, smoking hot, and fell to. While I ate the men watched me, but none spoke. Their behavior spoke highly of Ganner's discipline. As for the captain, he maintained his position on the table, swinging his heels and waiting for me to devour my rations. Had I been a stranger to his reputation I would have said there was nothing but good nature in his countenance, his bristling hair giving him a whimsical, surprized expression, which even the livid scar could not affect.

When I had finished and the trembling slave had removed the tray Ganner spoke in a low voice to one of the men. The fellow took up his musket and motioned to two others, and the three slipped out into the night. After the bolt had been shot behind them Ganner informed me:

"They've gone to look for Captain Harrison— You're not a native of this part of the country?"

"I've always lived in Charleston. I fancy it's hard work to find any natives of this region."

He chuckled in appreciation of my humor and pushed forward a handful of cigars and held a candle for me to light by. Selecting a weed himself, he remarked:

"This war has been a funny business. Do you know that until old Gates was whipped I really believed the rebels would win out. I almost think my sympathies were with them up till then. Of course I never allow sentiment to interfere with business; but I always was rather pleased when I heard they had made a kill. Now I know it can't be done. Half-fed, half-armed men can't whip well-fed, well-armed men. I know the Carolinas and Georgia, at least, must remain Crown lands.

"Some compromise may be made in the North. Perhaps the new republic will be allowed to stand on conditions that the Alleghanies and the southern boundary of Virginia shall mark the western and southern bounds of the republic. That would leave England everything to the gulf, for it's only a matter of time before Spain loses Florida. Then England would gain control of the Mississippi, and within twenty-five years would swallow the new republic without firing a gun. Yes, I'm rather keen to talk with your captain. But as I think it over there'll be something bigger than a captaincy and a bag of gold coming to me. I'm a man of parts; I look ahead. There should be a royal governorship for me in this business. What's your notion?"

The colossal egotism of the man staggered me. At first I fancied he was making game of me before putting me out of the way. But as I studied his face and read the avarice back of his perpetual smile I knew he meant it. Ruffian and beast, he was proposing himself as a royal governor.

"For the first few years a strong hand will be needed here. That's a point in your favor," I admitted.

He laughed aloud and stretched his open hand close to my face and began closing it slowly. I nodded in acquiescence to his claim of having a "strong hand;" and to make my words more plausible added:

"But royal favor has many claimants. I don't think you could expect more than two years of office at the most."

"Good!" he cried, beginning to walk back and forth along the table. "Give me one year even, and I'll get my share and hold the country safe for his gracious Majesty. What do you say, boys, to one year of fat pickings?"

They endorsed his pretensions with a mighty roar. It was the voice of the pack when running game by sight rather than by scent. He threw up a hand and they instantly became quiet. Stopping beside me, he lifted himself on the table, first making room for himself by pushing a decanter and some glasses on to the floor. Pulling a knife from his belt, he began stabbing and hacking the table aimlessly, unconsciously evidencing his supreme contempt for all property rights. And as he gashed the polished surface he quietly told me:

"I believe what you've told me. There wouldn't be any sense in your coming here unless you spoke true. It's odd that a civilian should be picked for the job, but I can understand how Cornwallis can use men who are not in uniform. Of course I've heard much of your uncle, old Macson. In fact, I've often hankered to get at his money-bags. I'll even say that while you were telling me who you are I had a notion of holding you for ransom, for squeezing the old man for something handsome. But seeing that he is a warm Tory, it wouldn't work, if I would have the other prize. No, it wouldn't work if I line up with his Majesty."

It was said regretfully. I smoked on placidly, wondering how I could get a few rods' start with my horse. With a blow that left the knife thrust deep in the board he brushed his hands briskly and announced:

"I've thought it all out. I must make a profit out of your visit here. I'll hold you, as my guest, until I learn how the cat jumps with Harrison. If he gives me a guarantee of a captaincy during the remainder of the war, plus a fat bonus, plus a year as governor of this province, we'll open the oldest jug in the cellar and drink each other's good health, and you'll ride back with the captain. If he balks, then I must make my gain out of your uncle. He should pay very liberally for your release.

"This plan will make it necessary for me to keep you under cover until I've learned the most the captain has to offer. If he shies at my terms I shall agree to everything he says, part with him, and wish him in ——."

"Rather a poor return for my efforts," I remarked.

"Highty-tighty, man! Love of me never brought you here. It's all a game and each man for himself."

"While my uncle would pay something for my release it wouldn't be any exorbitant sum. He owns much property, but his ready cash is greatly exaggerated."

"I think I can fry out quite a decent sum," he assured me.

" 'Fry out,' " I repeated, puzzled.

"Before the fireplace," he explained, smiling broadly. "After you've sizzled there a bit you'd write such a letter as to touch the heart of the devil."

"I now wish Captain Harrison had been the one to find you first."

"He would have been shot on sight and I would never have known his Majesty's kind intentions toward me."

His personal attention to me had held my mind on the *qui vive* to meet his queries and parry suspicions. It was a great relief to have him leave me. He went to a couch at one side of the hall and bent over it solicitously. For the first time I observed a man to be on the couch, his head concealed by a bandage. During my respite I frantically scoured my mind for some scheme of getting on the other side of the big door. Ganner would do exactly as he had threatened. Usually the evil a man works is exaggerated and he is blamed for much deviltry he never had the opportunity to do. But as I sat there, the focal point of many eyes, and smoked my cigar I was ready to concede to Ganner every crime on the calendar. His wickedness was constitutional. He loved it because it was devil's work. Give him all the wealth of the world on condition he live decently and he would not be able to keep his parole.

NOW the figure on the couch was rising to a sitting-posture, and Ganner was mixing spirits with water and giving the unfortunate a drink. He put a question in a low, soothing voice and pointed to the table. The wounded man shook his head. From the extent of his bandages and their deep discoloration he must have been shockingly wounded. Ganner left him seated on the edge of the couch and returned to me and in a voice of deep sympathy explained:

"One of my poor boys injured in a little brush yesterday. Three of the others were killed. May the devil bite me in two if I don't take rare payment for that job!"

My memory galloped. Three dead men. There were three dead along the road in front of old Ambros' cottage. There was a fourth, the one Elsie Macson had hit with a rock. I wished the fellow would lie down again. I pushed back my chair so as to bring one of the outlaws between him and me. He seemed content to remain on the couch, his hands hanging listlessly between his knees, his eyes staring at the floor.

Ganner interrupted my uneasy thoughts by remarking—

"About time my scouts came back."

"They should have found Captain Harrison by this time," I agreed. "But if they come along with him they'd be slower than if they came ahead."

"I ordered one of them to come ahead. Perhaps you are tired and would like to lie down?"

This because I had yawned—my first move to get out of the hall.

"I am very tired. If I could retire and rest until the captain comes——"

"To be sure!" he heartily cried. As I stood up he horrified me by directing:

"Two of you boys help poor Binn to a room. Our friend will rest a bit on the couch."

Two men steadied the wounded man and

got him on his feet. Only his eyes showed through the bandage. He started toward the stairs, his gaze roving listlessly over the company until it reached me. They dilated and he refused to go farther. I knew it was coming, and, yawning prodigiously, doubled my arms before my chest like one fighting against sleepiness and stepped behind my chair. The men urged the wounded man to move on but he remained rooted, his eyes glaring at me.

In a hoarse voice he yelled:

"Curse me, cap'n, but that's the chap that done for Ricks! Dawgs done for t'other two!"

As he spoke he swayed forward and pointed a quivering finger at me.

My right arm straightened out before me, the clenched fist catching the astounded Ganner on the chin and sending him across the table and to the floor along with a clutter of jugs, decanters and glasses. I knew I never could gain the door, push back the bolt, and get outside and win clear of the sentry. And raising the chair, I hurled it at the two nearest men, sending them on their backs, and sprang for the stairs just as Ganner struggled to his feet, his face dripping wine.

He gave voice to a howl that was the cry of a wolf. It was caught up by the men till the room rocked with the terrible threat. Now the gang was in motion. Besides the wine Ganner's face dripped blood from a cut across his forehead. He was in the lead as I mounted the stairs.

I looked back and his slate-colored eyes were fearful to behold. With an inarticulate scream he yanked at a pistol in his belt. I pulled first and fired, and as I did so he yanked a man in front of him. The fellow went down with a squawk, like a hen under the ax. The pack was now after me in a compact body. Half-way up the stairs was a landing. I reached this and seized a tall clock and hurled it behind me.

As I turned to complete my ascent I beheld a tangled mass of men where the heavy clock had mowed them down. What was more peculiar, I glimpsed the outside door swing open six inches, with the firelight playing on what might have been the face of a ghost. The face was grayish-white and there was a white nimbus about it. Then the door closed softly. I had no time to dwell upon this phenomenon as the gang was on its feet again, and Captain Ganner was once more in the lead, yelling to his men to take me alive.

The hall ran the entire length, of the second floor, with rooms on either side. Instinct told me it would lead to an impasse unless I had time to reconnoiter. At the head of the stairs stood a noble piece of furniture, a massive writing-desk with tiers of bookshelves above. In my desperation I seemed possessed of double strength. Just before Ganner and his men gained the landing I whirled the desk about and sent it plunging downward to block the stairway for a few moments. Ganner leaped backward and collided with his men, and down they went like skittle-pins on an English green. Now was my time to fly, only I did not know where to turn.

Running down the hall, I came to a closed door and was abreast of it when it opened and the light feeding up from the lower hall permitted me to recognize the terrified face of the slave who had served me with food. He tried to say something but could not speak. His beckoning hand was eloquent, however, and I darted into the room and gently closed the door. His hand, grasping mine to lead me through the darkness, shook as if he had the ague. He hurried me to what I supposed to be the door of a clothes-press. I held back, having no desire to hide in a hole and be caught like a rat.

"Outdoors, massa," he managed to tell me. Then I followed him willingly enough.

The pack was now pounding down the hall. I heard Ganner yell—

"Into every room!"

The slave closed the second door behind us and we were in darkness except for a vague blur on one side. My escort ran to this and I at his heels found it was an open window. Doubtless he had gained the upper hall by climbing up to this window. I flung my leg over the sill, but before I could jump he caught my hand and guided it to one side where it came in contact with a water-pipe leading down from the gutter above. The confusion in the hall was terrific, but I recovered from my panic, and remembered my manhood enough to draw back into the room and force my new friend to take the first chance at liberty. He stood on no scruples, but swung out and vanished in a moment.

Now some of the pack, including Ganner, were in the adjoining room and in another moment would be upon me. I straddled the window-sill but before I could grasp the pipe the knocker on the front door boomed tremendously, and a hoarse voice was crying—

"Open in the king's name!"

By some remarkable coincidence, apparently, the story I had told to Ganner had become a fact. His Majesty's soldiers evidently had arrived and they would never arouse a household without first throwing a cordon of troops about the place. In proof of this came the negro's yell from beneath my window. The men in the next room were pouring back into the hall and I drew back from the window. Down the stairs, pell mell, they streamed, Ganner stilling their wild chorus and issuing curt orders.

Leaving my retreat, I entered the adjoining room and ventured to the hall door. There was no one at the head of the stairs, nor could I hear any one at the farther end of the hall. Convinced I had the second floor to myself, I stole forward until I could peer down upon the gang.

Ganner stood at one side, with two pistols ready. His men were crouching behind the long table and behind chairs. One of the men gingerly approached the door and drew the bolt and threw the door open, taking care to stand behind it. For half a minute the men gaped through the opening. The man behind the door thrust out his head, then left his retreat and advanced to the threshold and nervously ducked his head forward.

"No one here, cap'n," he faltered, retreating from the darkness and crouching against the wall.

"What ——'s trick is this?" roared Ganner, running to the door.

I was fair bewildered. I retreated to the inner room and received the fright of my life when I bumped into a man. In a second my hands were at his throat and he was no slave, for his face was covered with a beard.

"You fool! I'm Ambros! Let go!" he gasped.

I released him and he staggered to the window and pumped for breath for a few moments. Then he was over the sill as spry as a cat. Down-stairs the hubbub was rising again. Men were mounting to the upper floor. Men were running across the veranda.

"We may be too late," whispered old Ambros from the heart of the darkness.

I SEIZED the pipe and swung out. It was substantially supported by metal contrivances, which stood out from the face of the wall enough to afford a fine hold for fingers and feet. It was like descending a narrow ladder, and I had no trouble in following it until my foot struck something that yielded. A sibilant warning told me I was stepping on my rescuer's head. For some reason he was clinging to the pipe.

Two fellows with a pine-torch, racing along the side of the building, explained the situation. When almost beneath us they halted and raised a loud outcry. We were some ten or twelve feet above them and I took it for granted they had discovered us. But Ambros' hand caught my foot and signaled for silence. I craned my neck and found myself staring into the open eyes of a dead man. The bloody condition of his throat told how he had been done to death. Having sounded the alarm, the two outlaws turned and raced for the front of the house.

Ambros dropped to the ground and I plumped down beside him.

"I had to remove the sentinel before I could sound the knocker," he whispered.

Directly behind us was an open window. I discovered it was open when the head and shoulders of a man came across the sill. I grappled with him, but the trembling voice pleading, "Fo' de Lord sake, massa!" told me it was the slave. I drew him to the ground and he scuttled off into the night like a frightened rabbit.

"Come!" commanded old Ambros. "Your horse is near here."

But the open window and the dead man fascinated me. Ganner's followers were ignorant men for the most part. I picked up the sentinel and pushed him through the window and then closed it.

"That'll bedevil them!" chuckled Ambros. "I moved your horse out this side. Here they come!"

We retreated as torches swept around the corner.

"Under the second winder!" yelled a man.

Ganner snatched a torch and swung it close to the ground.

"You fools," he thundered, dashing the blazing torch full into the face of the fellow who had brought him on the useless errand.

"There is no one here! Back inside!"

Off they went to rejoin those who were now searching the house for me. Ambros tugged at my arm to get me clear of the dangerous premises. I was reluctant to run away. Outside of the trap, with my horse close at hand, I felt no fear of the enraged banditti. I moved slowly and frequently paused and glanced back. I was rewarded by seeing a light enter the room occupied by the dead sentinel. The light was a torch, and it was swung rapidly to make it flame up. I could not hear the cry of dismay and fear which must have followed the discovery of the dead man.

Lights were flashing through the top of the house and voices were calling from the roof. Lights shone in the cellar and there was a general confusion, as when men let go of themselves and shout frantically and without reason. But the light in the dead man's room told the story in pantomime. It burst in ruddy flame and was slowly advanced here and there.

Then it came to a dramatic pause and slowly inclined toward the floor. Motionless it remained for a count of three and was then hurled into a corner. We hurried on and when next I glanced back there was still light in the dead man's room, but not that of a torch. It was a rosy glow that emanated from the floor and painted the interior a ripe red. Flame-tongues licked at the window.

"—— ye, come along," growled old Ambros. And I knew it was timely advice; for the mansion would soon be ablaze and melting away the darkness.

And yet the stirring events of the night were not finished with, for as the glow of the burning building made us hasten to find my horse and be off, there came the clatter of many hoofs and men in scarlet coats were galloping up to the burning building. Leaping to the ground, they began firing upon the Regulators, now being spewed through doors and windows by the flames and smoke. I could only think of devils coming out of hell.

A clarion voice soared above the din, promising:

"A hundred pounds for Ganner's head! Look sharp, men."

"That's Captain Harrison," whispered Ambros. "I dogged Ganner here to git even with him for his men's visit to my place. Then I got word to Harrison."

What would have happened had Captain Harrison arrived while I was in the hall with Ganner? Certainly, never this narrative.

The "Regulators," although taken by surprize, reacted quickly once their leader's shrill whistle sounded. They got together on the side of the burning building opposite our hiding-place, and made into the woods. Once in cover, their muskets began to crack and several of the British fell. Again sounded Captain Harrison's trumpet voice; and taking advantage of the bright light, his men mounted and charged the woods. From what I could see of the field, while Ganner lost at least a dozen men the British lost only three that I personally observed.

"What do you think of the British arms now, young man?" mumbled old Ambros as we stole away from the strife.

"I'm rather proud of them," I readily answered.

"They ain't killed that snake. Only scotched it," he regretted.

"Maybe General Marion's men will get a chance to finish the job," I suggested.

"It's good work, let the —— himself do it," he grunted.

I fell to laughing softly as I visualized Captain Ganner's rage over the actual coming of Captain Harrison and my picture of the captain's amiable errand. Surely it would never do for Esther Macson-Lance's son to fall into Ganner's hands again.

CHAPTER VI

ONE TOO MANY COMES TO CHARLESTON

THAT night old Ambros and I sought shelter in a rice-stack which miraculously had escaped destruction. Some time during the night he left me. I had not attempted to thank him, but, although he would have insisted he owed me the good turn and had simply paid a debt, I felt I owed him much. If I saved him from a noose—and with his dogs at hand I do not take credit for that much—he in turn had saved me from broiling before the big fireplace. The debt was entirely on my side, and it gruelled me to awake in the morning and to find the old fox had stolen away.

I saddled and was on my homeward journey before sunup, riding warily, for there might be some of Ganner's men or Captain Harrison's troopers in the neighborhood and I did not care to be picked up by either. I skirted Kingstree without any hindrance. The road to Murray's Ferry was soon covered, and once across the Santee I felt safe from "Regulaters" and inquisitive Tories. On my left stretched out the road to Georgetown, and in that direction I kept a sharp lookout.

Once I passed Monk's Corner and had turned my horse toward Strawberry, I threw aside all sense of care and took time to review the happenings of the last few days. Of all my pictures that of the girl on tiptoe at my stirrup stood out the clearest, although for sheer dramatic values the recollection of how the wounded man teetered back and forth, just before his gaze found and recognized me, stood out supreme.

Big Simon's adoration of my coat was the only comedy element in the experience, and that, in a measure, was pathetic. If not for the war I probably would have grown old and gray with never sight of my Lynch Creek kinsmen; certainly too old for a maid to stand at my stirrup.

It was while leaving Strawberry, after a very pleasant mess with some British officers, that I was surprized to behold Old Tan, my uncle's town butler. My first thought was that he had run away. This was an absurd idea as Old Tan considered himself to rank my uncle in all affairs of the Macson house, and nothing could oust him from his comfortable despotism.

He saw me as soon as I sighted him, and with a swing of his head that took in all his surroundings he quickened his pace toward me; only he did not scrape off his hat and stand one side as he should have done. He uncovered, of course, but kept moving as if I were a stranger. I reined in to question him; he bowed low and passed me a scrap of paper and continued on up the road.

Much surprized by the rascal's behavior, I was for riding after him and bringing him to book, but retained sense enough to open the paper. It was only a scrawl, my uncle's awkward, angular fist beyond any doubt, and at the first reading I could scarcely believe the evidence of my eyes. The message read:

> Sickly here. Advise you to go to Savannah and wait for clearing weather.

It was neither addressed nor signed. The handwriting told me it came from my uncle. I conned it repeatedly, then tore it into small particles and sifted them through my fingers. He had not dared to write to me openly, even when sending it by the faithful hand of Old Tan. "Sickly" in Charleston? There was no sickness there. The crisp, cool nights were reducing the chances of yellow fever even in the back districts. And he advised me to avoid Charleston and go direct to Savannah.

Obviously there was some danger in Charleston which I was to avoid. I was used to being guided often by my uncle's riper wisdom, and I was thinking to shift my course at once and make for Georgia's most important center, when the thought came to me that the danger, whatever it might be, encompassed my uncle. He wished me removed from the zone of trouble until some disagreeable situation had been cleared up. I could make nothing else of it, and I roundly condemned myself for not holding Old Tan for further information. I wheeled about and galloped back for half a mile, hoping to overtake him, but he had disappeared. It was plain he had been waiting at Strawberry on the chance of catching me returning from Lynch Creek.

Instead of making for Savannah, I continued toward Charleston and so timed my arrival as to pass through the city gate under cover of evening. Of course I encountered the leering gaze of Levi Smith, the gate-keeper, who halted me and held up his lantern and grinned sardonically on recognizing me. He rested a hand on my horse's neck and the spirited animal swerved aside.

"He smells the dead hand, Levi," I chaffed, for I had little liking for the fellow.

"Aye? Perhaps he'll smell the dead nearer home pretty soon," growled Smith.

My jest, though ill-advised and grisly, was easily understood. Nor was it to Smith's discredit. In fact, he had often boasted of the adventure. He was on the point of being hanged by the patriots in reprisal for Gabriel Marion's execution when rescued by General Marion. He had been ironed to another Tory and thrown into a stout cabin.

The two of them escaped, and as Smith's companion died in the woods the gate-keeper was confronted with the grim necessity of cutting off the dead man's arm before he could release himself from the corpse and make his way to Charleston. His response to my jest was less obvious. There was a threat in his words, and a threat in his sulky bearing, which, taken with my uncle's message, made me very uneasy. There was no way for the Tories to learn the nature of my errand; and yet something was wrong with Uncle David.

However, I was in for it now and rode up the broad streets ankle-deep in the sand and dust and surrendered my horse to a black boy and hastened into the house by the side door.

“JIM! Jim! You here?” gasped my uncle, taking both my hands only to drop them and hastily extinguish a brace of candles. “Come away from the window. So Old Tan missed you! The —— rascal fell asleep and let you get by him. I'll sell him for a field-hand!”

“I saw him. Only your writing was so confusing I had to come and find out what's gone wrong with you.”

“Wrong with me?” he gasped. “Why, nothing's wrong with me, lad!”

“What else was I to think?” I demanded, feeling greatly relieved although none the less puzzled. “You wrote it was ‘sickly’ here. Sickly for whom if not for you?”

“And you come back a-fearing something was wrong with your old uncle,” he whispered, his thin hands patting my shoulders. “God bless us, lad! I'm as fit a Tory as ever drew breath. But you? You've done something foolish. If you were down in Savannah, where I could say you were looking after some of my property, they might leave you be till this blew over, or some tall fighting made them forget it. But now that you're here! ——'s pitch! Why did you come?”

“But you? How did I know——”

“Oh, I know, I know!” he groaned. “And more the pity! Fearing for your old uncle. It's you, lad; it's you that must lay low. You must get out of the city tonight; and no pass will do this time. You must win clear of Charleston and remain in hiding——”

“Uncle David, what the —— does all this mean?” I exploded.

“Hush! Not so loud; the window is open. A Captain Tans has filed information against you; sent it in by messenger.”

I was restored to complacency.

“Bah! Out of the mouth of his fellow officers I can prove I did nothing to cause you any alarm, or me any trouble.”

“There's more. One Tickridge, a North Carolinian, arrived last night and filed certain writings. Can he prove anything against you, lad?”

“That's different,” I slowly admitted. “He can make it embarrassing. Not that I did anything a man could help doing.”

“No time for explanations now. We must work fast. Mayhap you were seen on entering the city?”

“By no one to recognize me I'm positive, except Levi Smith——”

“Better by Cornwallis himself than by Smith. He's already at work. Your way by the gate is blocked. I doubt if you could even make the Battery, and if you did I'd need time to get a boat in to take you off. I'm afraid we must fight it out here; so tell me what this Tickridge can say against you. I must know to work against him. I still have influence.”

“He can say—and I'll not contradict him—that I rescued a young woman from his men. She was wearing a man's garb——”

“Imbecile! To mix up with what doesn't concern you!”

“She was Elsie Macson, my cousin,” I informed him.

“Eh? The Macson brat! Well, well—Needs must when the devil insists. I think I can square that off the books. He'll be a newcomer, a provincial. I have powerful friends who stand close to his lordship.”

“Wait! In rescuing her I represented myself to be Major Wemyss——”

“We might as well cut our throats!” he moaned.

“Listen to me. You're not mixed up in this. You sent me out on business affairs. What I did beyond your commissions can't be blamed against you. So you're clear of the mess. I'll get out of the city tonight if possible. If I'm taken it'll mean a hearing and perhaps a few days in the basement of the Exchange. But nothing can harm you.”

“Oh, my ——! Stop it! Stop it! How dare you talk as if I feared for my old hide? Good ——! I've sweat blood because of you, lad, and never on my own account. Now you speak as you believed——”

His strong emotion affected me deeply; for he was not given to demonstration.

“You miss the point entirely, Uncle David,” I soothingly whispered. “You must stand clear so you can help me if I need help. If we both go to gaol there'll be nothing to stop us both from going on board a prison-ship. If you keep clear and use your influence they won't be very harsh with your nephew."

This seemed to comfort him and the hand on my shoulder ceased its trembling and patted me more confidently.

"There's sense in that," he muttered. "But the thought of you believing I was thinking of myself! There; there! That's done with. We must work. I'll lose no time in burying my hard money in the cellar. Money can make many a fist open into a soft hand. It all happened at the wrong time. His lordship is in a furious humor—all on account of Lieutenant Drance."

"Drance?" I repeated, the name being new to me.

"They think the rebels have caught him. He was to bring dispatches from Ninety-six— He reported there from Savannah. His lordship sent for him to report here and give a detailed account of how affairs are in Savannah. His disappearance makes the whole nest of them very peppery. I'll begin hiding my money right away. Thank God they can't take my lands from me!"

"Not unless the king wins."

"Besides David Macson only the Almighty has any title to those lands," he muttered. "But how I talk! I'm a good Tory. They won't disturb my titles. Still, I'll hide my money."

"We're losing too much time. Light the candles and write a note to the major of the town, informing him of my return," I said.

"My young nephew! Curse me if I turn informer!"

"But they already know I'm here. They'll get me anyway. It'll put you in a good light. It'll leave you strong to help me. Write the message to Major Fraser at once."

"I hate to do it, lad," he groaned. "It's like betraying you even if we both plan it as a game."

From up the street came a shuffling sound like the sound of feet treading the thick sand in unison.

"A light in your office at once!" I urged. "They're coming."

"But you can take the side door——"

"Charleston is sealed. To try to escape would be a confession of guilt. They can do me no harm. The light and the note to Major Fraser!"

I pushed him into the small room he used for transacting business affairs and lighted a candle and rang for a boy. Then thrusting quill and paper before him, I dictated:

> "To Major C. Fraser, major of the town.
>
> "I desire to inform you that my nephew, James Lance, about whom inquiries have been made recently, has but just returned and is now at my house, and that——"

A SUMMONS at the door and the shuffling of men's feet under the windows caused my uncle to drop the quill.

"Open in the king's name!" called a voice; and we knew the house was surrounded. Pressing my uncle back in the chair, I ran to the door and threw it open. Young Captain Posby, adjutant of the town, entered, followed by a file of soldiers. We knew each other well and esteemed each other highly, and I always had held him as a man of the most fastidious honor.

"—— raw business, Mr. Lance," he began. "But as town adjutant, —— take the job that puts me in such a cursed position— You men wait outside."

The soldiers retired, and with a deep groan Captain Posby said, "—— catch me, Jim, but why did you have to make a mess of it? And you were coming along so well at billiards!"

"I've made no mess of it, captain. When you know the truth you'll find I've done nothing that a man of honor could avoid doing."

"Bleed me white! I don't need to be told that. But men of honor at times have to do things that most horribly stir up his lordship. He's ferocious enough to eat raw meat! The question will be—did you do anything that's amiss for a good Tory to do?"

"That depends upon who's the judge. Captain Posby most certainly would exonerate me."

"——! He does that much already. Such a pretty stroke in nursing the balls. Why, man, if the war could only last another two years it would be hard to find your equal at billiards!" Another deep sigh and he was forcing himself back into his official self and stiffly saying:

"It's not for me to play at inquisitions. David Macson, I make you my compliments and most ——ably wish I didn't have to be here tonight."

The last as Uncle David came from his

office, a sheet of paper in his hand. His hand trembled and made the paper rattle and only by clinching his teeth did he keep his chin from wagging. The black boy had stolen in and was crouching by the side door, his big eyes pools of horror. To him Uncle David said:

"I sha'n't need you. Go."

To Captain Posby he said:

"I give you good evening. You are always welcome here. If duty sends you on a disagreeable errand, why better you than some one else. I was about to send this line to Major Fraser, announcing my nephew's return and his eagerness to meet his accusers. He came in ignorance of any charges being filed against him. Your coming saves the need of sending the note."

"Yet let me have it!" cried Posby, his honest eyes shining. "Gad! But it shows that the heart of this house beats true. I'll carry it along and Major Fraser can file it with the other papers in the case. And, David Macson, I must never forget my duty as an officer. And strike me dead if I'll forget my obligations as a gentleman. The two sometimes seem to fight each other. But it's not necessary to tell all Charleston my friend Lance came back here in ignorance of the charges filed against him. If the world and his lordship believe he came back here, fully aware black marks were being chalked up against his good name, it won't do him a cursed bit of harm. It might help his case."

My uncle swallowed convulsively at hearing my predicament dignified as a "case." Captain Posby, very red of face, glanced toward the open window and softly whispered:

"The only charges that count were filed by a —— provincial who never smelled gunpowder of an enemy's gun in his life. Jim will come off with colors flying, drums beating and all that sort of thing."

For the time this ended his relapse into the familiar. Motioning for me to precede him, he called on the guard to receive us as we passed through the door, and we passed from the house and up the street to the Colonial Exchange, in the basement of which I was to be detained.

It was a queer homecoming. As yet I could not believe I was in any danger. Beyond the humiliation and discomforts of a brief imprisonment I should suffer none, I told myself. As to the "discomforts" I had been alone a scant thirty minutes when my gaoler brought in a basket containing food and a fair bottle of wine. The wine was not up to my uncle's vintage and I correctly assumed it represented more kindness from Captain Posby.

That night I slept quite soundly, and if I dreamed of a maid it was in a mélange of glimpses, first in decent homespun and next as a gay gallant in breeches, with the whole thing so topsy-turvy that only the aroma of it abode with me when I answered the sun.

After I had breakfasted the gaoler rasped his keys against the grating of my door and then opened it. I had expected it to be Posby, or some of the other young officers I had played cards and billiards with; and I started briskly to give greeting. It was Tickridge, and my first look at his beef-and-pudding face told me he had come to triumph. He had been gay with odds and ends of colors when we met at Ambros' cabin; now he was resplendent in a more consistent fashion.

"Mr. Tickridge, what do you want?" I asked, seating myself on my couch.

"—— your impudence! Captain Benjamin Tickridge," he rattled back. "And a captain duly commissioned by the right honorable Charles, Earl Cornwallis."

This, despite his rage at my lack of respectful greeting, was rolled off with much gusto. His head went back because of pride until he seemed in danger of falling over backward.

"Then what does Captain Tickridge wish with me, seeing that I can not choose my callers?"

"I want to learn the name of the wench you stole from me. She is a spy, and bring her to justice in Charleston I will."

"Excellent! Anything else?"

"Of course to capture her I must know where she is to be found," he added.

"Naturally. I suggest you go to Snow's Island and ask General Marion. For if she be a spy she works for him."

"A rebel's answer! I'll face you with it later."

"When you do, please take time to explain why you held up this woman and subjected her to abuse that his Majesty frowns upon."

"That you can't prove," he jeered. "Little courtesy is due a wench who puts on breeches and rides alone."

"Have done with your errand and take

your ugly face out of here," I angrily cried.

He smiled down on me viciously and muttered:

"I swore I'd cut your comb, my young cock, and I'm about to do it. Major Wemyss, eh? Ho! Ho! You should have seen the major's face when I told him and Captain Harrison of the scurvy, rebel trick you'd played! Major Wemyss swore he'd take toll from that uncle of yours."

"Even Major Wemyss can burn his fingers," I carelessly rejoined. "While for you, don't think for a minute any time will be wasted in bolstering up a raw provincial's efforts to take his revenge."

With that I gave him my back and stared through the narrow grated window. He fumed and raved for a bit, but finding neither dignity nor satisfaction in the scene, he at last called the gaoler and departed.

THE day passed without more visitors until the shadows of late afternoon began darkening the basement and the lantern was lighted and hung at the entrance. When I heard steps coming toward the room doing service as my cell, I feared my uncle had thrown discretion to the winds and was about to compromise himself by visiting me. Then I classified the gaoler's heavy, spiritless tread. The other set of feet was too light and nervous ever to be my uncle's. It was Posby, and his fresh young face was filled with sympathy. The gaoler hung the lantern up outside my door and walked away.

"I've only a minute," jerkily informed Posby, thrusting his hand through the grating. "The town rings with your arrest. Your uncle hasn't been dragged into it yet. His note to Major Fraser testifies to his ignorance of your acts. But there are those who are keenly set against you. Is there anything I can do, consistent with my status as an officer? I'd never make the offer if I didn't know you were far more deserving of decent treatment than all these cursed pig-headed provincials who're flocking in for commissions now they think the war is won. Flocking in and getting 'em, by gad! Ever since old Gates was whipped every man-jack over here who owns a few acres and a few slaves wants to wear the uniform. Almost queer you never asked for a commission."

I laughed and the relaxation steadied my nerves.

"Of course that sounds very off," he hastily apologized, his face flushing. "But I never meant it that way. I meant with so many blusterers asking commissions it would have been fearfully proper for you to receive one."

I was beginning to doubt my loyalty to his Majesty. I had not advertised broadcast my claims to neutrality. In proclaiming it to myself, however, I reserved the right to choose my allegiance. And Posby was too good a fellow to be let in for anything rough because of his liking for me.

"There's nothing you can do, captain," I told him. "The charges against me would be ridiculous if his lordship could understand all that's behind and around them. I'm guilty of helping a woman escape from a gang of brutes."

"Of course! Of course!" he impatiently cried. "I'd 'a' done the same. And at the least you can truthfully swear that, so far as your knowledge goes, the woman wasn't up to any game to harm his Majesty's cause."

"I couldn't vouch for her loyalty to his Majesty that far," I replied. "I only know that under similar circumstances I would rescue her if I could, even though I knew she was Marion's best spy."

"—— a fiddler! But that's poor talk to take before the commandant," he ruefully protested.

"Accept my thanks for the basket and go before you're tarred with the same stick," I urged.

He flushed angrily and growled—

"I'm not one to turn tail because there is danger."

"Your enemies can swear to that!" I heartily declared. "I'll gladly call on you for help if there comes a time when you can help me without forgetting your uniform."

"If a woman's in a beastly mess the first thing to do is to get her out of it," he muttered, as if arguing with himself. "Then there's time enough to consider her standing. Friend Jim, I'm going to see your uncle. He's sent enough jugs round to headquarters to have some influence left with his lordship. This thing must be quashed before it grows too big. No chance, eh, to make it out a quarrel between you and that big lout of a North

Carolinian as to who should get the woman?"

"No! no!" I cried, restraining myself only by remembering his desire to serve me and his entire ignorance of the woman involved. "'Twas merely a question of Tickridge not getting her."

"Eh? Not getting her? —— his fat paunch, but that's cursedly well put!"

He pondered for a moment and his face grew more grave. Sighing dismally, he took down the lantern preliminary to departing; then paused to warn me:

"This Tickridge is very popular at headquarters. The failure of the countryside to rise and exterminate the Whigs is sore disappointing to his lordship. He'd counted on it heavy. The coming of Tickridge makes headquarters believe the back-district Tories are about to get into the game, that much similar help is on the way. He's sort of a cursed symbol, you know. The fool doesn't understand that part of it. Takes it all as a personal compliment, and it's quite turned his thick head. They jammed a commission on him the minute he arrived from Georgetown. He's puffed up like a toad full of flies."

He left me and I was alone with my second night of imprisonment. My optimism was much dashed. There was no new reason for this except my isolation was wearing on my nerves. With no one to talk to, no open danger to face, my imagination suggested many traps and destroyed my perspective. I could make a good fight against Tickridge on the ground the girl was being abused, provided I denied any knowledge of her antecedents.

Aside from my reluctance to deny knowledge of the girl there was my impersonation of the fiery Wemyss. A court of inquiry would frown on that most severely. If I had been actuated solely by a desire to protect womanhood why had I not announced my name and station? Why should I have assumed Tickridge would have ignored my protests?

But using the major's name! No, the subterfuge was too gross to be overlooked. For a trip planned merely to deliver forty pounds of hard money to the Lynch Creek Macsons my journey was netting me some very disagreeable results. But there was one star in the black heavens of my plight; the girl's kiss, delivered on tiptoe at my stirrup. Even his Majesty could not deprive me of that.

LATE that night I was aroused by the rasp of the key against the grating and sat up on the couch to blink at the gaoler's lantern. A voice said:

"Call him to the door. I won't go in."

Without waiting to be summoned, I crossed the room. The lantern shone in my face and blinded me at first. Then I recognized old Ambros. Behind him stood Fraser, the town major, and he was staring at me most truculently.

"Yes, I know him," said Ambros. "He saved me from four of Ganner's Regulators a few days ago. I evened it up by helping him escape from the hands of Ganner himself when I led Captain Harrison to the skunk's hiding-place."

"That's sufficient," snapped Fraser. "You can tell the rest before the court. This is merely a form to get our records straight. There's been some bad business going on and whoever had a finger in it will stretch a rope."

"If he's running with the rebels he must be stamped out," growled old Ambros as he walked away with the major.

Bright and early next morning Captain Posby was back at my door, his face very grave. "Why do you come here, my friend, when it can only make trouble for you?" I reproached him.

"I'm here in my official capacity," was the stiff reply. "From Major C. Fraser, major of the town."

I took the communication and read:

> TO MR. LANCE.
>
> SIR. I am ordered by the commandant to acquaint you that a court of inquiry will be assembled tomorrow at ten o'clock, in the Province Hall, for the purpose of determining under what point of view you ought to be considered. You will be allowed immediately pen, ink and paper; and any person that you choose to appoint will be permitted to accompany you as your counsel, at the same hour and place. I am, etc.
>
> C. FRASER, Major of the town.

"Tomorrow! I won't have much time," I remarked.

"Today," corrected Posby. "It's dated yesterday. It was given me not more than ten minutes ago."

"I knew it was coming, or something like it; and I'm glad it's your friendly hand that delivered it," I told him.

He stood very erect, and in a harsh voice asked—

"You have a choice of counsel?"

I shook my head. What was there for a counsel to do? I knew what I should say. No one could say it more intelligently than I, for none knew the circumstances as well. Besides, a court of inquiry could only be a preliminary to a general council of officers, or some such body, when the full examination of the circumstances would be made.

This would be the mode of procedure, as I understood it, excepting when the accused is charged with being a spy. No such charges could be lodged against me. The delivery of the official notice had distressed me. Now calmer thought brought a return of my old optimism. I had been scaring myself with bogies. There was an excellent chance that the inquiry would end the whole matter. I even fancied that my uncle's influence had been at work. This preliminary arraignment and general discussion would be followed by recommendations that the charges be dropped. Posby broke in on my meditations by saying:

"I have a big favor to ask. I want you to name me as your counsel."

God bless the loyal soul! I could have hugged him for his offer. I told him:

"Time enough for that if I'm held for a general council. Even then, my dear friend, I couldn't drag you into it."

"It would be my duty as a British officer. I ask it," he insisted.

The gaoler was out of hearing. On the impulse—and never had I a truer one—I confessed:

"The woman I rescued is my cousin. She is very young. She is aiding the rebels to the full of her ability. I had never seen her till I made this trip. I believed she was in danger of worse than death. There was nothing I would not have done to save her."

"Your cousin," he blankly murmured. "Of course one has to help one's cousin, when the cousin is a young woman. Nay, I'll go further; if in *that* danger you had to help her if she hadn't been related. And where is one to stop giving aid to the rebels? Curse all puzzles! You, a loyalist, being dragged into such a mess."

"My views are being changed, I think," I ran on. "The change is helped along a bit by my treatment of the last twenty-four hours. I'll even say I may find myself turned into a rebel if I get out of this."

"Turn devil if you must!" he angrily exclaimed. "The point is that now, this morning, you are honorable. You are my friend. I insist on acting as your adviser."

"Then be it so," I surrendered. "And if I die of the rope I'll say God bless at least one of his Majesty's officers."

"Oh, nonsense," he growled, backing away and holding the lantern near the floor that I might not see any emotion in his face. "There's lots of us fellows who are quite decent; neither house-burners, nor sheep-killers, nor women-stealers." Which was quite true.

His visit and kind offer heartened me greatly. I ate my breakfast with much gusto and was impatient for ten o'clock to arrive. At last there was a welcome tramping of feet and Posby, as adjutant of the town, came for me. As we walked through the basement behind the guard he whispered:

"The court should be in good humor. A runner came in with word that Lieutenant Drance, captured by the rebels near Ninety-six, has escaped, saved his papers, and is on his way here to present the Savannah report to his lordship."

FOUR staff-officers and five captains were awaiting my appearance in the town hall. Back of them were seated Captain Tickridge, Sergeant Newt, and half a dozen of Tickridge's troopers. Old Ellis Ambros was not present. Colonel Jacks presided and the proceedings were opened with much informality. He asked me if I had selected counsel, and on my replying in the negative he did not urge the necessity of my doing this.

This in itself satisfied me the hearing was something of a farce; something that must be gone through with but which would soon end in my release. Without placing Tickridge under oath, the colonel called on him to give his facts, which the captain did with much spirit.

He exceeded the rights of a witness by passionately setting forth his beliefs, unsubstantiated by evidence. I remonstrated against this license, and insisted the witness confine himself to what he had seen. Another of the staff-officers, a stranger to me, suggested that I hold my peace and wait until it came my turn to speak, when I would have every chance to refute the witness.

Despite the gross violation of inquiry

etiquette by Tickridge, his assaults on me impressed me as being a happy augury. I must be let go, but he was to have the poor satisfaction of abusing me first. For if the court were bent on my destruction, I argued, their conduct would have been more punctilious and their bearing stilted. Instead, the members lounged about in careless attitudes and talked among themselves while Tickridge was ranting his loudest.

So I listened to Tickridge's charges philosophically, quite sure no one else was giving him careful ear. When he described how I had impersonated Major Wemyss the buzz of whispered conversation died down and the gentlemen stared at me stolidly in condemnation of the sacrilege. Tickridge was followed by Sergeant Newt, who exaggerated my act of striking him down into a felony. He entirely neglected to mention his assault on the girl.

Other soldiers followed, none being under oath—a small matter if they had been—and when one proved to be unusually stupid Tickridge bawled at him furiously, and with leading questions put the desired answers into his mouth. Even the members of the court could not entirely smother their smiles at the fellow's prompting. Captain Posby, who sat behind me, whispered in my ear—

"That red-faced fool is a better witness for you than against you."

Colonel Jacks announced that Captain Tans had failed to arrive to give his evidence but that the substance of it had been sent in in writing, and he proceeded to read it. I could not see that it amounted to anything, simply relating that on the strength of my pass I had deprived him of the pleasure of whipping a half-wit who, he believed, was one of Marion's spies.

Captain Tans' caste was that of the members of the court, and they listened to his charges with grave faces. When the colonel had finished I rose and said that Marion would never employ a scatterbrain as a spy, having too high an opinion of his Majesty's officers for that. The colonel smiled, but cautioned me about making remarks until called upon.

With the direct evidence out of the way, one of the captains lazily asked me to explain why I had palmed myself off as Major Wemyss. I said that the woman was in terrible danger, that the sergeant had all but throttled her, that to save her from a terrible fate, and realizing that Tickridge's forces were unattached, and in fact were nothing better than independent troops and operating as their leader's whims suggested, I had used the first expedient that came to my mind after disposing of the sergeant.

I insisted that the impersonation of the officer was most complimentary to Major Wemyss, and showed that I believed that even the North Carolinian had heard of his fame and must respect his name. May God forgive me! Even if my duplicity were ill-advised I insisted there was nothing criminal in it. That being a civilian and believing the exigency called for desperate measures, I had used the name and rescued the woman. I did not divulge the things I had confided to Captain Posby. When I had finished Colonel Jacks asked if I had any witnesses to corroborate my statements.

"As it was not until this morning that I received notice this court would sit at this time I have had no opportunity to procure witnesses," I replied. "Nor do I know as I could produce any material witness even if time were allowed me. Ellis Ambros, if he were here, could testify to my activity in ridding him of four of Ganner's cutthroats, and that I was aided by the half-wit I had induced Captain Tans to hand over as my guide."

"Ellis Ambros has talked with members of the court. We believe we possess all that he could say in your favor or against you," informed Colonel Jacks.

As I had nothing more to offer in my defense the inquiry was adjourned and Captain Posby started with me back to my prison.

We were scarcely clear of the hall when the captain softly cried—

"There's a most proper looking fellow!"

I lifted my head and glanced up the street and beheld a young man, mounted on a spirited horse, coming toward us. In truth, he was unusually comely to look upon. There was dandyism in his gay uniform and in the swagger with which he maneuvered his horse, let alone the immaculate condition of his accouterments and trappings. And, also, there was something which warned one not to presume on this show of vanity and overstep the niceties.

We were gazing approvingly at the gallant figure the newcomer cut and Captain Posby was remarking that he was a stranger, albeit a king's officer, when he pulled his horse in to our side of the street and pushed back his wig a bit to wipe the perspiration from his forehead with a bit of lace, and then composed himself to wait till we had covered the few rods and were abreast of him. Saluting the captain, he said:

"I am Lieutenant Drance, just arrived from Ninety-six. I am a stranger to the city. Can you direct me to where I can find his lordship?"

"Lieutenant Drance! We've heard of you. We're glad to know you have arrived. Turn to your left and you will be on King Street. Follow it until you come to the Brewton house. That's his lordship's headquarters; and any one on King Street can direct you to it. I am Captain Posby, town-adjutant, and shall look you up later."

Lieutenant Drance thanked him, patted his wig and then rode off. Captain Posby had need to speak to me twice before I heard him. Even then my ears were humming so his words had little meaning. Something inside me was expanding until it seemed that my heart must burst. In God's mercy why had she dared to thrust her pretty head into this trap? Why did she dare to assume again male attire and ride into Cornwallis' city?

Forsooth, but she would find it vastly different from masquerading along the lonely banks of Lynch's Creek! And above all else how did she dare to impersonate the bearer of dispatches, which would require her facing his lordship and staff and be subjected to innumerable questions concerning Savannah and Ninety-six?

It impressed me as being suicide. But by ——! Captain Posby was right in admiring Lieutenant Drance. Never had I gazed on a more eye-filling appearance. Unlike Captain Posby, however, I saw what he could not suspect; the bony face of death ever at her shoulder. And I saw what I trembled with fear to think all men must see; the elusive dimple near the corner of her mouth, just as it showed in the Theus portrait of my little mother.

"Thank Heaven! Everything seems to be turning out all right," said the captain.

"Oh, I hope so! I pray so!" I sighed.

"Blood me! but you're not gone off?" he incredulously cried. "Why, you were the coolest one at the court. What megrims have seized upon you now?"

I came to my senses and smiled to show my unconcern.

"I'll feel more at ease after we get into the general council and some order and decency are observed in receiving the evidence," I explained.

"Bah! It'll never reach a general council. That beast of a Tickridge showed his spleen too plainly to take in his Majesty's officers— Gad! but that was a pretty turn you gave the evidence when you said you used Wemyss' name because of its influence! I'll swear Colonel Tarleton will be jealous when he hears it. Major Wemyss should be here any time now. He'll be in high humor to find Lieutenant Drance has arrived."

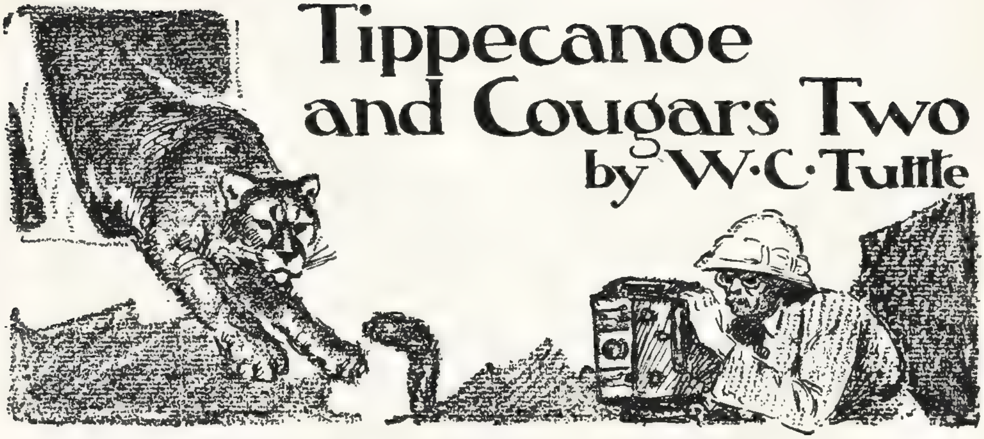
"Why? Why should he?" I forced myself to ask.

"It was he who sent in word Drance was laid by the heels. While there's some rank between them, and some years, the two families are very thick, and the major and the lieutenant have carried on the friendship."

TO BE CONTINUED

Tippecanoe and Cougars Two

by W·C·Tuttle



Author of "Sparing the Family Tree," "Figures of Speech," etc.

IN THIS here vale of tears where a person ain't got but one way out and has to die to find that exit, I've met a lot of fools. Yea verily, they have come from the ends of the earth to do injury to my nervous system, but while I may never look the same, I have managed to keep my carcass out of the loco-lodge in spite of their having done unto me things which I could never have done unto them.

Some of them have been of the common or hillside variety, which you may bust with a six-gun and not figure that you've ruined any of God's beautiful works; while others has been of educated stock, peculiar to look upon and listen to. But to all ye fools, whether ye be shepherd or scientist, I say unto thee: there is a place at my table—come and get it! But, all ye of absent mind—vamoose!

A fool is merely one who is destitute of reason; but an absent-minded man is anointed of the devil, and his days are few and far between if he gets in range of my wickiup. Tell yuh why I'm against everybody who forgets to remember.

"Tippecanoe" Seeley was one of the reasons. When it came to forgetting he was seven thousand degrees in the shade. He never thought of anything with more than one syllable, and his back-trail was littered with things he'd forgotten to do.

Everything he done was with a reverse English. If he wanted his dog to follow him he'd throw rocks at it instead of whistling. He'd cook mush for his supper, thinking it was breakfast, and then sit up all night kicking about the dark days we're having in this Western country. He packed a .45 Colt and filled his belt with .45-70 rifle cartridges.

He was a peculiar-looking *hombre*. Eating his own cooking had just about finished up what Nature was ashamed to do to him. Mostly always he'd have his pants on backwards or his shoes on the wrong feet. One nice thing about him was the fact that he never repeated what was told to him—he never remembered it.

Me and "Magpie" Simpkins, my pardner, are doing a little work on our alleged gold-mine on Thunder Creek about five miles from Piperock. We cut out a road to our cabin and she's some road, I'd tell a man. Beyond our cabin is the Thunder Creek trail, which hugs the side of an awful steep mountain for several miles.

Our cabin was built on the only place where we could find room to hook it on to the side of the hill, and we've got about fifteen feet of ground for a front yard, and the rear of the cabin sets back into the hill.

Beyond our front yard the landscape just falls for a mile. We've sure got a restricted building-site, a wonderful view and nothing to see.

One morning I'm sitting in the cabin cooking a pot of beans, when all to once I hears a awful noise coming up the road. I pokes out my head and sees an automobile heaving and twisting towards the cabin. That road is barely out of the pack-trail age, which means she's still within the

Stone Age and noways appropriate for horseless carriages. Anyway, they got to the cabin and stopped.

The feller who is doing the driving is one of them cadaverous-looking little persons, long on glasses and short on chin. Somebody has sold him a suit of clothes which must 'a' been ordered for a African explorer, even to one of them front-and-back-porch hats. The other person in the seat is Tippecanoe Seeley.

"Howdy," says I, and the feller nods.

"Is this 'Hackamore' Harper or Ike Harper?" asks Tip, peering at me.

I've knowed Tip for ten years; so I don't laugh.

"I'm Ike," says I.

"By the whiskers on the waumpus, I knowed I was right!" he squeaks. "I knowed I'd get the right Harper. Can't fool old Tippecanoe—y'betcha."

I congratulated Tip on his ability, which was all right and proper, even if Hackamore had been dead four years.

"Hackamore," says Tip, "meet Professor—uh——"

"Doctor Aloysius Van Fleet," says the lion-hunter. "At your service."

"I can't use you," says I. "I'm running things alone now."

"We comes out to see you about something," says Tip, "didn't we, reverend?"

"Reverend," snaps the other. "Ain't I told you plenty of times that I'm the professor?"

"I thought you said 'Doctor'," says I.

The little fellow lifts his hat and feels of his bald head.

"Well, maybe I did. Sure I did."

Then he turns to Tip. "You know as well as I do that I'm not a doctor. I am a— What were we talking about anyway?"

"My ——!" says I. "Two of a kind! What did you want of me?"

Tip and Aloysius looks at each other for a moment and then they look at me.

"What was it?" asks Aloysius. "You know, don't you?"

"——!" grunts Tip. "I didn't hire out to keep track of your wants. I hired out to—to— What in —— did you hire me for anyway?"

Aloysius turns and stares Tip in the face.

"You mean to say you don't know what I hired you for?"

"Nope," says Tip, puzzled-like. "Do you?"

Aloysius puckers up his eyebrows and seems to try to remember, but finally shakes his head.

"My gosh, that's some gun you got!" says I. "What kind of a weapon do you call it?"

"Oh that," says Aloysius. "I forget, but I know it's a five-passenger. I must have bent the steering-gear in the rocks."

"Well," says I, "you better get out and rest your mind a while."

They climbs out. Tip picks a rope and walks around to the front of the machine and then stops and rubs his nose.

"You don't need to tie it, Tip," says I, and he nods.

"I forgot that I'd already took the team to the stable."

THEY sets down on the steps of the cabin and admires the view. Pretty soon Tip sniffs and cranes his neck.

"Whatcha cooking in— That's it! That's it, judge! We wanted to hire him to cook!"

"Ah," grins Aloysius. "You surely can remember things. I congratulate you on a wonderful memory. Mister—er—what's the name?"

"Harper," says I.

"Ah, yes—Harper. We—er—wish to hire you to act as our guide."

"That's it!" yelps Tip, slapping himself on the knee. "That's it, professor. I knew I was hired for something, and that's it. I'm to guide you."

Aloysius stares at Tip for a moment and then nods:

"I believe you are right. I wish I had your ability to remember little details. Yes, you're the guide."

"Guide and a cook, eh?" says I. "Where you going?"

"Exactly," agrees Aloysius, turning to Tip. "Where are we going?"

"Did you speak of any certain place?" asks Tip, foolish-like.

"Why certainly, I did," says Aloysius, peevish-like. "I certainly did."

"Oh," says Tip. "I see how it happened. You was standing on my left when you said it, and I can't hear very well in my left ear. Tell me again."

Aloysius considers it for a while and then clears his throat.

"Ahem-m-m-m! Seems to me that I had some place in mind at the time, but I must have misplaced it. Now what places have you around here?"

"You don't happen to be hunting elephants, do you?" I asks, examining that double-barreled rifle, which had a bore like a twelve-gage shotgun.

"Elephants?" asks Aloysius. "Hunting elephants?"

"There ain't none," says Tip, wise-like. "There ain't been none since the Custer massacre."

"The last herd I knowed about was up in the Flathead country."

"You mean buffalo, don't you?" I asks.

"Buffalo? Sure. What did you think I meant?"

"Aloysius," says I, "you'll do well. You've got some guide."

"Yes," says he. "I know I have. I saw a man in town and I asked him where I could find a guide, and he directed me to Mister Seeley. He said that Mister Seeley had forgotten more about the country than most anybody knew about it."

"He didn't lie to you at that," says I, and it pleased old Tip a heap.

"By golly, I sure *sabe* the country all right," he squeaks. "There ain't no place I can't go."

"That's right, Tip," says I. "You don't need to worry about finding places, but you sure can't remember the way back."

Sudden-like Aloysius hops up and stares around.

"What's eatin' yuh?" asks Tip.

"You're a fine guide!" whoops Aloysius. "Goodness gracious, where are the rest of us?"

"Rest of us?" asks Tip. "Oh, you mean them folks what was with you?"

"My wife! Where is she? Where is the rest of them?"

"I dunno," grunts Tip. "There was some folks got out of that blamed machine when you stopped at my place. Was they intending to stay with us?"

"I think so. In fact I'm almost certain they intended coming with us. Why, we must go right back there at once."

"Not me," says Tip, shaking his head. "Not in that thing. Go ahead if you wants to."

"You refuse to go? Very well then, I'll go."

He hops into that machine, fusses with it a moment, and she begins to heave and grunt.

"You can't go out that way," says I. "The road ends here."

"Turn around, can't I?" he snaps.

I looks at the road and stumps and shakes my head.

"I can," says he. "I'll do anything for my wife."

"All right," says I. "It's your machine and your wife."

I don't know how he done it, but he did. He went over rocks, stumps or anything in front of him. Half the time he wasn't in the seat at all, 'cause that machine pitched and bucked like a bronco, but he pulled leather and stayed with her.

He made as complete a circle as anybody would want to see, and stopped right in front of the cabin again—pointed the same way he was before he circled.

"Didn't I do it?" he crows. "Told you I——"

Then he looks ahead and behind.

He looks at Tip's grinning face, and right there Aloysius gets sore.

"I hired you to guide me!" he wails. "The fellow in Silver Bend was right."

"What did he say about Tip?" I asks.

"He told me to get a guide," explains Aloysius. "He told me I'd get completely turned around in this country, and he's right— I did."

"Do it again," says Tip. "By the whiskers on a waumpus, I ain't never been so amused before in my life. Do it again. I'll show you one stump you missed."

I walks over and peers into the body of that machine. There's enough stuff in there to start a trading-store with.

"What's that rigging in there?" I asks, and Aloysius seems to get over his peeve.

"That is my picture machine. Ain't I told you about that yet? Well, well!"

"He's going to photygraft animiles," shrills Tip, grinning. "Goin' to get them on the move, too. Danged nigh impossible, I reckon, but the blame fool thinks he can. Says he's going to photygraft grizzlies and mountain lions. Haw! Haw! Haw! Interests of eddication. Be of benefit to the people. Daw-gone! I reckon the undertaker will get his, and that's about all."

"My dear sir," says Aloysius, "you seem remarkably able to get facts twisted. I hired you as a cook—not to prophesy."

"You did like ——! I'm the guide."

"Well, guide me then! I want to go——"

Aloysius wrinkles up his brow and scowls at Tip.

"Where were we going?"

"I refuses to advance a prophecy," says Tip, expectorating at a lizard. "I'm your guide and that's all. You tell where you want to go and I'll take you there, y'betcha."

"I want you to take me to my family," says Aloysius, deliberate-like. "If you are of any value as a guide you can do that!"

"I ain't—not thataway. I'm here to——"

"You said you could guide me, didn't you?"

"Yeah, I said that—shore; but I ain't no wife-restorer. Daw-gone it, why don't you put hopples or a bell on her before you loses her for keeps?"

"There's Lord Washburn, too," says Aloysius, as the threads of memory begins to tickle his brain, "and Bettina. Yes, there's three of us missing. What do you suppose they think?"

"Same kind of folks as you?" I asks.

"Same kind? Why, they're my people."

"Don't worry then," says I. "They likely ain't missed you yet."

"But I absolutely need them," says he. "Lord Washburn is——"

"Here comes a wagon," says Tip. "Maybe somebody is bringing 'em up here."

* * *

AROUND a turn in the road comes our wagon. Magpie Simpkins is perched up on the seat, herding our two pinto broncs, and beside him sets a female who only needs four more pounds of lard and an ambition to get into a sideshow.

Setting on a pile of plunder in the back is what I'd designate as Bettina and Lord Washburn. Bettina might 'a' been good-looking—it's all a matter of opinion, but Lord Washburn—oh, man!

He's got one of them walrus mustaches, a one-eyed spectacle and knee panties. From his collar in the back to the crown of his head he is one succession of rolls, the same of which makes a fellow wishful to puncture one with a pin and let the air out.

Magpie skids them shy pintos up alongside of that machine and slams on the brake.

He looks at me, winks one eye and sighs—

"Well, folks, here we are."

"Haw!" says Lord Washburn. "Haw! Joke. Heard it before. Where had we ought to be?"

"—— only knows," says Magpie, sad-like. "Any old place except in the hills, I reckon."

"Aloysius Van Fleet," says the old lady, glaring at the lion-hunter, "what do you mean by leaving us down there? If this gentleman hadn't come along—well, I shudder to think what might have happened. Can't you never remember anything?"

"Shucks," says Tip. "You'd 'a' been all right."

"Who asked your opinion?" asks the old lady. "Who are you anyway?"

"I'm the—the—what am I?" Tip looks at Aloysius, who shakes his head.

"Well," says Washburn, "I'd say we might as well dismount. After this I shall keep my eye on the car. The roads in this vicinity are beastly, don't you know?"

The lord and Bettina climbs down and we all sets around. Magpie looks at me and shakes his head.

"How'd you happen to come along?" I asks Lord Washburn.

"Really." He screws his glass into his eye and stares at me. "I have proffered my services to Doctor Van Fleet as nimrod extraordinary. We are here, as I understand it, in the interest of natural history, to photograph the wild beast in its own environment, and I am acting as a sort of body-guard to the doctor in case any of the animals should—er—annoy him."

"Ever done much shooting?" asks Magpie.

"I've shot with kings."

"What did the other fellow have?" asks Tip. "Aces?"

Then I hears Aloysius' voice raised in a high key:

"My dear, I was so interested in our new guide that I never noticed you getting out of the car. He's a jewel. Wonderful memory."

"Well," says his wife, "I'm glad you had sense enough to hire a good one. Bettina, my love, are you standing the trip?"

"I think so, mamma," squeaks Bettina, and then she says to Tip, "I beg your pardon, but can you tell me how long we will be here?"

"Ma'am," says Tip, "I am a guide, not a prophet. I was hired to find animals, not to make time-tables."

"Oh," says Bettina. "Why are we stopping here?"

"Ask your pa," advised Tip. "He put on the brakes."

"Papa, did you put on the brakes?" she asks.

Aloysius scratches his head and looks around.

"I really can't remember, my dear. Where did we have them last?"

"——'s delight!" grunts Magpie. "Reckon I'll unhitch that team so as to keep my mind off the painful things of life. Better take them two boxes of dynamite and put 'em where that bunch can't fall over 'em, Ike."

I unloads two fifty-pound boxes of powder and the bunch of grub Magpie had been to Piperock after, while Aloysius, Lord Washburn and Tip seems to hold a conference. Then they comes over to me.

"Can we go any farther with the car?" asks Aloysius.

"Well," says I, "after seeing you hop the rocks and stumps out there, I'd hate to say."

"Mister Seeley tells me that your two spotted horses are suitable to carry luggage," says Washburn. "We would like to rent them, if we may—in the event that we can go no farther with the car."

"I've got four saddle-hosses at my ranch," says Tip. "Women can ride 'em."

"Women can ride 'em, Tip?" I asks.

"Women can ride as well as men, can't they?"

Just then Magpie comes back, and I puts it up to him about the pintos.

"To pack?" says he. "Sure you can have the horses. Won't guarantee 'em though."

"Oh, that's perfectly all right," says Aloysius. "I assure you we will take a chance on them wearing out."

Magpie looks at me and I look at Magpie, but we don't say a word. Neither of them broncs has ever had anything on their backs, except a harness.

WELL, that whole danged bunch sets right down and makes themselves to home. Lord Washburn is an English setter and the rest is blooded stock in which the setter instinct predominates. Magpie goes over to Tip, and says—

"Well, why don't you pitch camp, Tip?"

"I ain't running the show. Ask the lord. He, he, he! Sounds like a prayer."

"A prayer might be in order," nods Magpie. "After looking the bunch over, I reckon we better ask for divine protection."

Then cometh mamma. Mamma sizes me up, like she was looking at a dogy, and says:

"Will you prepare a dinner menu so I may consider it?"

"Will I prepare a dinner me and you?" I asks. "That's a —— of a way to use United States language, ma'am. Why don't you say, 'Will you prepare a dinner for me and you, so we may eat?' Up here we don't consider nothing but our stummicks, ma'am."

Mamma rears up and almost falls over backwards. She adjusts her glasses and glares at me.

"Of all things!" she snaps, which covers everything a mule-skinner could say in five minutes' straight cussing.

"Such insolence!" Then she whirls and yelps, "Aloysius!"

Aloysius' backbone settles about seven inches when he hears that yelp, but he toddles over beside her. She grabs him by the arm and points at me.

"You selected him," she snaps. "Him!"

"Did I?" squeaks Aloysius. "All right, dearie."

"Now discharge him!" she whoops.

"But—but, my dear," pleads Aloysius, "I—I must have a guide."

"Guide? Didn't you hire him as a chef?"

"Chef? Perhaps I did, dearie."

"I demand his discharge—at once!"

"Well," says Aloysius, sad-like, and mamma shakes him, "well—get out—out of the kitchen. Now, my dear, I have discharged him—who will get dinner?"

Mamma sets her jaw and looks all around. Her eyes light on Magpie and she decides quick.

"I employ that man in the late chef's place. Prepare a menu—at once!"

Magpie's mouth forms a real smart reply, beginning with profanity, but he manages to choke it back. Then he stares at me and then at her.

"Yes'm. I got all my education at night the same of which spoils me for writing in the day-time, but I'll orate a bill of fare."

"Very well!" she snaps. "I am listening."

Magpie smooths his mustache and chants:

"Bean soup, hot enough to burn a burro's belly,
Fried bronc's ears and Gila-monster jelly.
Horse-hoof salad and some jerked rawhide,
Baked turkey buzzard with some loco fried,
Sidewinder gravy and a sunburned spud,
Saddle-blanket pie and a cup of mud."

"And," says Magpie, looking up at the awed face of mamma, "that is a —— of a good feed for a he-man, if anybody should ask yuh."

Mamma swallers hard and flops her arms like she was going to fly, but her voice won't seem to work. She sort of puffs up full of words and all at once she explodes:

"Of all things!"

"Yes'm," agrees Magpie. "Such as they are."

Mamma takes two deep breaths and walks away stiff-legged like a peeved bear. Aloysius cocks one eye at mamma, and then squints at Magpie.

"Pup-paw," says Bettina, "I'm ashamed that you would let a man say such things to mummaw."

Aloysius looks at Magpie and then back at Bettina.

"My dear, one must use diplomacy. I find that cooks are very scarce, and—and besides, your mother is too—er—cocky. Isn't that the right word to use, Lord Washburn?"

"I—er—" Lord Washburn screws the one-eyed spectacle into his eye and squints hard—"I would—er — rawther say — er — speaking in the feminine gender regarding fowl, I would say she was—er—a bit henny. Haw! Haw! Haw!"

Bung!

Anyway I think it "bunged." I didn't hear it, 'cause I was the one it bunged upon. I know I woke up and found them all grouped around me, and old Tip says—

"Aw, you can't kill him that easy, but I'll bet that pot-cover will never fit again."

I got up and declared myself like this—

"I can lick the —— fool who hit me!"

"There he goes again, pup-paw," wails Bettina. "He's meaning mum-maw."

"Is she the —— fool?" I asks.

"She is my wife," says Aloysius.

"That's a sensible answer," says I. "Why did she hit me?"

"Women," says Tip, "never need no reason. Them female contraptions is a heap like dynamite, because they bust without provocation at times. I reckon she was aiming to land a court-card and drew a deuce. Lord What-yuh-call'm haw-hawed at the wrong time."

"Then Lord What-yuh-call'm better lay off on that haw-haw stuff," says I. "I ain't going to have no —— females banging me on the head just because some snake-hunter of a lord opines to haw-haw at the wrong time. What you haw-hawing about anyway?"

"Joke," says he. "Good joke. Aloysius says, 'She's getting too cocky, don't you know?' and I replied, 'I'd say she was—er—rather henny.' Haw, Haw, Haw!"

It was five minutes before the lord woke up. I whanged him on the head with a lid off the Dutch oven, and he just sets right down and stares into space.

"That was a dastardly deed," says Bettina, trying to take the lord's head in her lap; but he acts like one of them toy things what you can't make lay down. Every time she tips him over he flops right up again.

"You plumb knocked his gyroscope out of kilter," says Magpie. "Want me to set on his neck, ma'am?"

The lord begins whistling through his teeth and pretty soon he gets red in the face and looks around.

"What happened to me, I'd awsk?" says he.

"You got in the road of that pot-cover," says Magpie.

"Pot-cover?" he asks. "I beg your pardon."

"You're welcome," says Magpie. "The old lady hit Ike with it 'cause you haw-hawed at the wrong time, and then Ike tried to hit the old lady 'cause you haw-hawed at the wrong time again."

"Did you try to hit mum-maw?" asks Bettina. "Did you actually contemplate that? Why?"

"You can draw your own conclusions," says I.

"She can't draw anything," declares Aloysius. "She spent a year in Paris and ten thousand dollars tryin' to learn how to draw, and—and——"

"Pup-paw, that is very unkind of you to air our family affairs before strangers."

"Don't mind me," squeaks Tip. "Fight if yuh feel like it—I'm hard-boiled."

"I'd venture to say that I am misunderstood," states the lord, rubbing his head. "What had art to do with the present situation, I'd awsk? There has been altogether too much coarse badinage and exchanging of—er——"

"Pot-covers?" asks Magpie.

"Exactly. I hope we will succeed in our mission, but I am of the opinion it will require unprecedented good fortune to repay us for the discomforts of the environment in which we are placed."

"My gosh!" snorts Tip. "You don't need a guide—you need a e-metic. I wish I had a almanac so I could see if he was chidin' us, or just runnin' over with wisdom."

SOME folks will naturally say that we're all wrong in talking and acting like we've been doing. They'll orate that Western chivalry is extinct like the dodo or Free Silver, but such is not a fact. Western chivalry is all there like it is in the East.

This bunch of misfits comes on a forlorn mission. They picks us out to be servants unto their wishes, whangs us with pot-covers et cettery, and nobody, unless they're of the same kind, color, and complexion, can expect us to kiss, humor, and coddle said conglomeration of misguided humanity.

Magpie is just through being sheriff of Yaller Rock County, and I'm willing to help Aloysius all I can, being as he's a cripple—mentally; but the rest of the scientific herd—nothin' doing in sympathy or helpfulness. I'm plumb neutral and noncommittal.

The old lady gets to fussing around and pretty soon she says:

"Aloysius, I really must have food. It will soon be dinner-time and no preparations are under way. Attend to this please."

"Yes'm," says Aloysius, foolish-like. "Yes'm. Where do we dine?"

"Where?" asks mum-maw, looking down at poor little Aloysius. "Where?"

"Oh," says Aloysius, and then goes to writing in his little book.

Mum-maw gets sore as a boil and sort of appeals to Lord Washburn. He shakes his head and says:

"My dear Mrs. Van Fleet, I know nothing whatever of the culinary art. I was under the impression that Mr. Van Fleet had engaged a chef."

"He did," says Tip, "and the old lady had him throwed out of the kitchen. Women raiseth —— with everything—seems to me. I comes danged near getting married oncet, I——"

"Forgot to go to the church," says I.

Tip nods and grins.

"Did I? Maybe I did—I forget. Anyway, I ain't got no wife, for which I raises my voice in a prayer each day."

"Your domestic difficulties have no bearing on my dinner," says mum-maw, meanlike. "I want to eat!"

"Shucks, if that's all you want, I can cook," says Tip. "There's two things I sure can do, and one of them is cook."

"What's the other?" asks Magpie.

Tip scratches his head and thinks hard.

"Danged if I know right now, Magpie, but she's a accomplishment, as I remember it."

Let me pass over that meal. I tried it and found it guilty of everything. I ain't no hand to fuss over the way my stuff is cooked; but I'll be danged if my stummick can stand for parboiled tea and a mulligan thickened with baking-powder.

I reckon everybody except Aloysius and Tip felt the same about it. Aloysius puffed up a little, but I can't see much change in Tip.

"Mighty" Jones rides in and looks over the aggregation. He asks me and Magpie about them, and we tells him all we know.

"Goin' to photygraft animiles?" he asks. "On the run? Geemighty!"

"Oh, absolutely," says Aloysius. "Interests of science. I want pictures of wild animals in their native haunts. Would it be possible for—er—us to get pictures of panthers, grizzly bear and—er—wildcats—uh—er—going about their daily—er—pastimes, as it were?"

"As it were," nods Mighty. "Not as it is."

"It can be done," says Tip. "There ain't nothin' impossible, is there? Just because a grizzly never did let anybody photygraft it as it is——"

"Exactly," says Aloysius. "I am glad to find a man who does not insist on precedent. We will secure the pictures we desire without any effort, I assure you all."

"Why does the grizzly object to being photographed?" asks Bettina.

"Superstition," says Magpie. "A grizzly is superstitious about photography. They figure that it's unlucky to let a photographer cross their trail."

"We will—er—commence on the—er—inoffensive—er— What is it, Mr. Seeley?" asks Aloysius.

"Inoffensive?" asks Tip. "What you talkin' about, senator?"

"The—er— Now, I adjure you, I am

not a senator. We spoke of some animal, which we might try the machine on. Was it the—er—tom-cat?"

"Bob-cat," says Tip. "We'll find one at once. We ought to have some dogs."

"Domestic animals I do not wish for," states Aloysius.

"You don't have to wish," says Tip. "Wishin' never got nobody some dogs."

"I'll rent my pack," offers Mighty.

"There yuh are," says Tip. "Mighty's dogs will find animals if there is any."

"I hired you as my guide," reminds Aloysius. "As long as I've got you I have no use for a pack of dogs."

"Ah-oo-o-oo-o-o!" howls one of Mighty's dogs, and away went the whole pack down the side of the mountain.

"What do yuh reckon they're after?" asks Mighty.

"After?" grins Magpie. "Oh, nothing. They're insulted, that's all."

One thing I can say for Mighty's pack of dogs, they're numerous. I reckon that he figured that the more the merrier, and he sure picked up everything of the dog kind which had four legs, a tail, and a voice. They starts going just like a whip. For instance, the seven greyhounds leave first, then four or five fox-hounds, then comes all breeds and mixtures, the order of their going depending a heap on their powers of smell.

The last to leave is old "Whiskers," a cross between everything doggish from a St. Bernard to a pink poodle. Whiskers sniffles all the time and smells nothing. He's the popper on the whip, that's the way they leaves. That conglomeration of animiles is enough to put the fear of the devil into anything wilder than a fool-hen.

We watches 'em go and then listens to their voices fade out.

"In Europe," says Lord Washburn, screwing his one-eyed spectacle into his eye, "I would say they were on a warm scent. Perhaps it is a fox."

"Fox ——!" grunts Mighty. "Them pups won't even look at a fox."

"Ah-oo-o-o-o-o-o-o-o!" comes the chorus, and we listens freely.

"Ah-oo-o-o-o-o-o-o!" she comes again, and this time she's a lot closer.

Me and Magpie looks at each other. It appears to us that the chase is coming down the trail, and knowing that trail like we does, it's almost a cinch that the procession is due to come past the cabin.

The trail swings around the side of the cañon, and the hill drops straight off for a danged long ways, and the upper side is almost unclimbable.

Lord Washburn walks past the automobile and appears to squint up the trail, and Aloysius walks behind him. I steps over beside the cabin and Magpie joins me. Bettina and mum-maw joins the lord and pup-paw.

All to once the dogs' voices swells to a joyful chorus as they make the curve above the cabin.

THEN things begin to happen. I seen Lord Washburn seem to lift right off the ground and come backwards towards us at an enormous rate of speed. Aloysius gets hit, and goes past me and Magpie, spinning like a pin-wheel. Something hits me a side-swipe and I goes down only to come up amid a whooping, howling, snapping bunch of dogs which swamp me, and I goes down again.

When I awoke, I feels some one kissing me, and I looks up into the face of Whiskers. I shoves him away and sets up.

There is Magpie, with his back braced against the cabin door, digging his heels into the dirt to keep upright. Mum-maw is sitting with her back against a wheel of the automobile, while Bettina is sitting straddle of the engine-end of the machine, clapping her hands like she was encoring that bunch of dogs, et cettery, to make another appearance.

From the body of the machine appears the head of Aloysius. He looks all around, down at his better half and then at his daughter.

"Stop applauding, Bettina!" he says, hoarse-like, and she looks foolish-like at him.

Then he looks all around again.

"I ask every one to cease cheering."

From on top of the cabin comes a voice, and we looks up to see Tip, with one arm hooked around the ridge-pole and both feet up on top of the cabin. He's hanging on tight.

"Animiles!" he squeaks. "Said you'd see 'em, didn't I? Didn't I say you would?"

Aloysius squints at Tip and nods.

"I did—a fleeting glimpse."

"Well, dang it, I didn't agree to stop 'em, did I?"

"Heaven is my home!" gasps mum-maw. "What happened?"

"Nothing," says Aloysius. "Nothing to get excited about."

"Wh-where is Lord Washburn?" gasps Bettina, all out of breath.

"Ma'am," says Magpie, "I ain't making no definite statements; but if he stuck on that silver-tip's back, and if the silver-tip can keep up his speed for ten minutes longer, Lord Washburn will be somewhere in Canada."

"Well," says I, watching Magpie digging his heels into the dirt, "that cabin won't fall down if you leave go of it, Magpie."

"No, but the door will come open, Ike."

"Oh!" says I. "It likely will, but that won't hurt nothing."

"Like —— it won't."

"Meaning what?"

"Both of them danged cougars went inside."

"Both —— cougars?" I gasps, and Magpie nods.

"Uh-huh. I reckon them dogs got after them two cougars, swung 'em on to the trail where the silver-tip was pesticating along, and the whole caboodle came to our party."

"I—have—shot—with—kings," states a voice, and we turns to look at Lord Washburn.

He's a mess. I reckon that silver-tip took him for a sightseeing trip through a thorn thicket, and he sure got shucked. He's got a half a shirt left, and that ain't connected with his pants, said pants consisting of a waistband and a lot of streamers. His stockings are pulled down over his shoes and drag out behind as he walks.

But he's still hanging on to that one eyeglass. He weaves there in the trail and repeats his statement—

"I—have—shot—with—kings."

"He, he, he, he!" squeaks Tip. "'Pears to me that the king used a cross between a shotgun and a rake."

"Where is the bear?" asks Aloysius.

Washburn screws his eyeglass tighter and licks his lips.

"Bear?" he asks, dignified-like. "Really—er—I did not awsk it for an address."

"They're hard to ride," nods Tip. "Danged hard."

"It enhances the difficulty if one is riding backwards," agrees Lord Washburn. "The—er—dogs——"

"Say, where is Mighty Jones?" I asks.

Magpie jerks his thumb behind him at the door.

"You don't mean that he's inside?" I gasps.

"He went in," says Magpie, foolish-like, "and he ain't never come out—yet."

"Wait a moment," says Tip. "Lemme get this right. Two cougars went inside and Mighty Jones went in after them? Mighty's brave."

"No-o-o-o," drawls Magpie. "Mighty went in first; the cougars are brave!"

"What might a cougar be?" asks mummaw.

"A cougar?" parrots Tip. "A cougar is—a—a—naturalized African lion."

"In the cabin?" asks Aloysius. "My chance has come! I will picturize it. Lord Washburn, we will start our first film. This is a very good opportunity."

"Told yuh I'd find animiles for yuh," grins Tip. "I sure can do guidin', can't I?"

"Yes, I find you satisfactory," grunts Aloysius, wrestling with his photygraft apparatus.

He gets it out of the machine and sets it up. It's a three-legged dingus, and on top of it he fastens a box-like arrangement with a crank on the side.

"Hey!" yells Mighty's voice from the inside. "Hey, out there!"

"No hay," yells Tip. "Whatcha want?"

"Magpie!" yelps Mighty. "You going to let me out?"

"Unattended," admits Magpie.

Just then a cougar cut loose a yowl you could hear a mile. Aloysius stops fussing with his camera.

"Got 'em both!" whoops Mighty. "Buck, dang yuh, buck!"

"Both what?" squeaks Tip.

"Got 'em roped!" whoops Mighty, and our ears gets assailed by a lot of cat-talk which shows that them cats are sore.

"Where are you located, Mighty?" asks Magpie.

"On the bal-co-nee!" whoops Mighty.

We've got a little loft arrangement built at the rear of the cabin, where we keep our extra supplies; but it sure wasn't built for no *Romeo and Juliet* balcony scene.

"Got 'em roped on the same rope, too," brags Mighty. "Come in and have a look."

Magpie opens the door slow-like and peers inside. Then he turns to Aloysius.

"There's your picture, mister."

We all crowds into the doorway. Mighty

is setting on the edge of the loft. He's got the rope snubbed to the cross-pole of the loft, and on each end is a cougar, and if anybody asks me, I'll orate aloud that them cats are peeved.

"How did you get up there, Mighty?" asks Magpie.

"Up here? Say, this ain't high to go—under them circumstances."

"By Jove, that's wonderful!" gasps Lord Washburn. "Cawn't we get them as they are, professor? It will be instructive in a way, don't you think?"

"Um-m-m-m," says Aloysius, and then he nods. "A still!" he exclaims. "Wait until I set up the other camera."

He comes back with a different outfit, and sets it up inside the doorway. Them two cats just set there and spit. After Aloysius gets through looking through the rigging, he gets awful excited.

"Wonderful opportunity," he announces. "I will make several exposures. I will have Bettina, Lord Washburn, Mrs. Van Fleet, the guide and the chef in the picture with the lions. Immense!"

Then he turns to me and says—

"You will be my assistant."

"Yeah?" says I. "What do I do?"

He places Magpie and Lord Washburn on one side and on the other he puts Bettina, mum-maw and Tip. In the middle is them two spitting cougars, and setting on the edge of the loft is Tippecanoe Seeley.

Aloysius peeks at them through the camera and then loads the thing. He takes the dingus and pours it full of some kind of powder and hands it to me.

"Hold that over your head," says he. "Put your finger into that ring and when I requests it of you, pull down on it."

I follers directions. Aloysius tells everybody to stand perfectly still, and then says—

"Pull!"

I PULLED. Yeah, I pulled. Ike Harper seems to have been created to foller directions. Looking back at it, I comes to the conclusion that if I'd 'a' killed the professor when I first seen him, this world would have been sweeter.

As I said before, I pulled. Comes a blinding flash of light, the yowl of a scared cougar, the splintering crash of overweighted timbers, and, as "Hip-Shot" Squires used to say, "—— took a recess."

It appeared that one of them cougars came unto my bosom, and I sure took it in. I went high, wide and handsome, and got clawed from heels to dandruff. Something got me by the feet and something got me by the head, and they pulled opposite directions. The feet end of me was pointed towards the door, and whatever the power was on that end—it won.

I remembers skidding on the seat of my pants off our door-step and down that danged hill. I hooked my feet against a rock, and then the power on my neck raises me upright and yanks me upside down again, and all this time I'm locked in deadly combat with that danged cougar.

Suddenly we stops in a blaze of glory. I dodges a flock of stars and tries to set up. Then the cougar in which I have my teeth, fingers and spurs seems to set a precedent of natural history when it says in a faint voice—

"Well, by ——, I hope we stay stopped!"

I unhooks from said cougar and looks into the peaceful face of Magpie Simpkins.

"I thought you was a cougar," says I.

He looks at me painful-like and says—

"Since when did you start eating raw cougars, Ike?"

I didn't answer him because I didn't care to answer such fool questions. We both got up and started back for the cabin.

There was a sight for sore eyes. Them two cougars busted loose when the balcony went down, and they must 'a' swept the cabin clean with that rope.

Mum-maw has got the rope around her body, and is half under the machine. Lord Washburn has got both feet twisted in the rope and is standing on the back of his neck with his feet cinched up to the seat where one of the cougars is reared back, trying to get loose.

The other cougar is still fastened to the other end of the rope and is about six feet away from the machine, all twisted up in that camera. Every time the cougar moves the camera moves, and then the cat wallops it with both paws while it searches the depths of its soul to try and find cat-talk enough to describe its opinion of photography.

Setting on the door-step is Tip with his hands on his knees and a beautiful expression on his homely face. He is looking at the scene before him; but he don't see it, 'cause his thoughts are of spiritual, not material things. Suddenly his expression changes, and he grunts soft-like—

"Still ——!"

Aloysius has got an egg-sized bump over his right eye, and one of them cougars has opened his clothes all the way down his back; but Aloysius don't mind. He's trying to set that moving-picture camera and all the while he's singing, soft and low:

"Daha-a-a-ling, I am gro-o-o-wing o-o-o-old,
Sweet Alice with ha-air so-o-o-o brown,
Through the sycamo-o-o-res the candle-lights are gleaming,
The moss-covered bu-u-u-u-cket that hung in the well——"

"My ——!" grunts Magpie. "He's even absent-minded in his songs."

"He, he, he, he!" squeaks Tip, hammering his hands on his knees. "Can't that fellow jist make a banjo talk? Whoo-e-e-e-e-e!"

"Cawn't some one do something?" complains Lord Washburn. "This is insufferable."

I see mum-maw twitch her feet, and then she lets out a screech that skinned the yowl of a cougar four ways from the jack.

"All ready! Camera!" snaps Aloysius, and he starts grinding on that machine.

Then out of the door comes Bettina. She's got her hat down over her eyes, but that don't matter, 'cause she wouldn't have seen Tip anyway. She just walked right over him and lit sitting down in front of the cougar, and right behind her comes Mighty Jones.

He's got a section of that balcony around his neck and Lord Washburn's two-barreled rifle in his hands. Before we can stop him he raises the gun and pulls both triggers. I jumped in to stop him, but all too late. I reckon that both of them big bullets hit the rope within a foot of Lord Washburn's legs and cut it plumb in two.

The cat on the ground went right between my legs, and that camera stand caught me in the shins and I turned upside down. I seen mum-maw roll loose and turn over on her stummick. I hears Aloysius saying, "Just a moment, Lord Washburn," and I glances up there. Lord Washburn is trying to throw himself backwards, and the cat is objecting at the top of its voice.

"Hold it!" pleads Aloysius, grinding as fast as he can. "Orrr-r-r-r-r-oooooooowwwww!"

It was too much for the cat. I seen it go in the air, straight for the doorway, while Lord Washburn turned over, kicking his feet loose from the rope.

The cat hit Tip dead center, knocked him half-way into the cabin door, and the cat almost popped its own tail off going inside.

"My ——!" gasps Magpie. "Didja ever see such ——"

"Hold it!" gasps Aloysius. "Easy now."

He picks up that heavy camera and trots to the doorway where he peers inside.

Yeo-o-o-o-o-oww! Crash!

You can't fool a cougar more than once, and that one recognized that interior. It came right out again. I reckon it meant to jump plumb over everything in sight, but it was fuddled a little and hit the camera dead center, and cat, camera and Aloysius all went down together.

The cat hopped right off the ground, and went between Tip's legs; but Tip was falling at the time, falling away from the crash, and him and the cat went to the dirt together.

Comes a whirl of a man, cat, and dust, and here is the cat under the machine with its tail under one of the tires and Tip hanging on with his feet braced to the wheel. The cat is throwing dust like a fanning-mill, trying to get loose.

"Huh-hurry up!" squeaks Tip, spitting dust. "You wanted animiles, dang yuh—here they are!"

"Hold it!" pleads Aloysius, and here he is with what is left of his machine, trying to get it to grinding again.

"Hold it, I demand of you!"

"Well, I—I—I'm huh-holding, ain't I?" squeaks Tip.

"I can't see it," complains Aloysius, peering into dust.

"Go around the other side!" grunts Tip. "Aintcha got no sense?"

Aloysius staggers around to the other side, and in a few moments he says:

"Absolutely wonderful! I see him now."

"Good!" squeaks Tip, and lets loose of the tail.

Yeow-w-w-w-w-w-w!

Me and Magpie steps around on the other side, and there sits Aloysius, holding to one ear, and about ten feet away is his camera.

"Is the cougar gone?" I asks. Aloysius looks up at me, wide-eyed, and says—

"Well—I—have—hopes."

"Dang yuh," squeaks Tip. "You wanted movin' pitchers, and I reckon that'n moved fast enough for the most fastidious, eh? By the grab! I'm some guide, ain't I? Contracted to show you animiles, and I reckon you seen 'em, didn't yuh?"

* * *

"ALOYSIUS VAN FLEET, get up!" There is mum-maw with her arm around Bettina, glaring down at poor Aloysius.

"Ye-yes?" says Aloysius.

"Crank up the machine!"

"The animals are all gone," says he, sad-like.

"I was speaking of the automobile!" snaps mum-maw. "We're going home. We have had all of this that we can stand. Bettina is a nervous wreck and I am no better. Right now we go home."

"Yes, my dear. I am willing. It is no place for the gentle sex, I have found that out."

"Pup-paw," says Bettina weakly, "please face the audience as much as possible. You are—uh—open in the rear."

"Really," says Lord Washburn, "it was trying, I assure you. I shall welcome my bawth. Did we—er—get some films, professor?"

"We did," smiles Aloysius. "I got at least five hundred feet. Perhaps it is not exactly what I wished for; but it was well worth taking."

Aloysius winds the danged automobile up, they all gets aboard, and he makes that turn once more and stops at the door again; but this time he's pointed the right way. Tip is standing there scratching his head like he was trying to remember something.

"Say, judge," says he, "you told me to remember something that I was to be sure and not let you forget, and I can't seem to think what it was?"

"I am not a judge," says Aloysius, severe-like. "I am—a—a—a—huh——"

"Drive on, Aloysius Van Fleet, before somebody thinks of something more," says mum-maw, and Aloysius obeyed.

We watched them make the turn in the road and then sets down on the porch.

Tip is still thinking hard. Mighty rubs a skinned place on his face and says—

"Funny how they just turn a crank and——"

"That's it!" whoops Tip.

He jumps up and starts to run down the road, but stops.

Then he comes back.

"Gol dang it, I plumb forgot it!" he wails, waving his arms. "Ain't that the darndest thing to forget? Shucks!"

"What did you forget to tell him?" asks Magpie.

"He told me to be sure and not forget to tell him to do it!" wails Tip.

"What?" snaps Magpie.

"To load his danged movin'-pitcher machine," says Tip.

WIGWAMS

by H. P.

THE conical-shaped dwellings of the Algonquian tribes extending from Canada to the Carolinas were called wigwams. According to Wood in "New England's Prospect" the word was borrowed from the Abnaki by the first colonists in Massachusetts. Wickiup, according to the B. A. E., is of doubtful origin, but probably comes from the Kickapoo. It is the name for the brush lean-tos and mat-covered dwellings of the Nevada and Arizona tribes. Hogan, according to the same authority, is from the Navaho, although to the uninitiated it savors of the Celtic. It is the earth house of the Navaho.

Tipi, popularly spelled tepee, teppe, etc., is from the Siouan root, *ti*, "to dwell," and *pi*, "used for," says James Mooney, of the Bureau of American Ethnology. It refers to the skin tents of the plains tribes. This style of shelter was used by the Sioux, Arapaho, Kiowa, Comanche, etc., and is the model of the Sibly army tent.

Earth and grass lodges were used by the Omaha and Osage. Sedentary tribes, such as the Mandans and Minnitarees, built circular huts, often ninety feet in diameter.

The Wichita grass hut, circular and dome-shaped, was from forty to fifty feet in diameter (Cyrus Thomas).

Mooney says that owing to a scarcity of ponies to drag the tipi poles the shelters of northern tribes were "fewer in number and larger in size than among the southern tribes." Grinnell speaks of a triple tipi with three fireplaces used by the Blackfeet in ancient times.

"The house architecture of the northern tribes is of little importance, in itself considered; but as an outcome of their social condition and for comparison with that of the southern village Indians, is highly important."—Morgan, quoted by Mooney in his article on "Habitations."

The Last Stage

by John Buchan

Author of "Prester John," etc.

The Thirteenth Tale in the Series, "The Path of a King." Each Story Entirely Complete in Itself

The Story behind the Stories

SO THAT the general idea of this series of stories may be more visible in each issue, two of them each time appear together. For in the stories themselves there is practically nothing concrete to indicate any connection between one of them and any of the others. Each story stands entirely on its own feet, complete in itself and differing from all the others in place and time and plot. Yet through them all runs a Path—a Path of a thousand years—"The Path of a King."

As expressed in the author's foreword to the series, it is not for nothing that a great man leaves posterity. The spark once transmitted may smolder for generations under ashes, but at the appointed time it will flare up to warm the world. God never allows waste. Yet we fools rub our eyes and wonder when we see genius come out of the gutter. We none of us know our ancestors beyond a little way. We all of us may have king's blood in our veins. The dago who blacked your boots may be descended by curious byways from Julius Cæsar.

"I saw the younger sons carry the royal blood far down among the people, down even into the kennels of the outcast. Generations follow, but there is that in the stock which is fated to endure. The sons and daughters blunder and sin and perish, but the race goes on, for there is a fierce stuff of life in it. Some rags of greatness always cling to it, and somehow the blood drawn from kings it never knew will be royal again. After long years, unheralded and unlooked for, there comes the day of the Appointed Time."

You will note that practically the only surface suggestion of any kind of connection between one story and any of the others is that the king's ring of the old Norse viking, introduced in the first story, is more or less casually mentioned in following stories and of course is always in possession of some one descended from that king, though the king himself has long since faded from human memory.

A SMALL boy crept into the darkened hut. The unglazed windows were roughly curtained with skins, but there was sufficient light from the open doorway to show him what he wanted. He tiptoed to a corner where an old traveling-trunk lay under a pile of dirty clothes. He opened it very carefully, and after a little searching found the thing he sought. Then he gently closed it, and, with a look toward the bed in the other corner, he slipped out again into the warm October afternoon.

The woman on the bed stirred uneasily and suddenly bcame fully awake, after the way of those who are fluttering very near death. She was still young, and the little face among the coarse homespun blankets looked almost childish. Heavy masses of black hair lay on the pillow, and the depth of its darkness increased the pallor of her brow. But the cheeks were flushed and the deep hazel eyes were burning with a slow fire. For a week the milk-sick fever had raged furiously, and in the few hours free from delirium she had been racked with omnipresent pain and deadly sickness.

Now those had gone, and she was drifting out to sea on a tide of utter weakness. Her husband, Tom Linkhorn, thought she was mending, and was even now whistling—the first time for weeks—by the woodpile.

But the woman knew that she was close to the great change, and so deep was her weariness that the knowledge remained an instinct rather than a thought. She was as passive as a dying animal.

The cabin was built of logs, mortised into each other—triangular in shape, with a fireplace in one corner. Beside the fire stood a table made of a hewn log, on which lay some pewter dishes containing the remains of the last family meal. One or two three-legged stools made up the rest of the furniture, except for the trunk in the corner and the bed.

This bed was Tom Linkhorn's pride, which he used to boast about to his friends, for he was a tolerable carpenter. It was made of planks stuck between the logs of the wall and supported at the other end by crotched sticks. By way of a curtain top a hickory post had been sunk in the floor and bent over the bed, the end being fixed in the log wall.

Tom meant to have a fine skin curtain fastened to it when Winter came. The floor was of beaten earth, but there was a rough ceiling of smaller logs, with a trap in it which could be reached by pegs stuck in the center post. In that garret the children slept. Tom's building-zeal had come to an end with the bed. Some day he meant to fit in a door and windows, but these luxuries could wait till he got his clearing in better order.

On a stool by the bed stood a wooden bowl containing gruel. The woman had not eaten for days, and the stuff had a thick scum on it. The place was very stuffy, for it was a hot and sickly Autumn day and the skins which darkend the window holes kept out the little freshness that was in the air. Beside the gruel was a tin pannikin of cold water which the boy Abe fetched every hour from the spring. She saw the water but was too weak to reach it.

The shining doorway was blocked by a man's entrance. Tom Linkhorn was a little over middle-height, with long muscular arms and the corded neck-sinews which tell of great strength. He had a shock of coarse black hair, gray eyes and a tired sallow face, as of one habitually overworked and underfed. His jaw was heavy but loosely put together, so that he presented an air of weakness and irresolution. His lips were thick and pursed in a kind of weary good humor.

THE WORE an old skin shirt and a pair of tow-linen pants, which flapped about his bare brown ankles. A fine sawdust coated his hair and shoulders, for he had been working in the shed, where he eked out his farming by making spinning-wheels for his neighbors.

He came softly to the bedside and looked down at his wife. His face was gentle and puzzled.

"Reckon you're better, dearie," he said in a curious harsh, toneless voice.

The sick woman moved her head feebly in the direction of the stool, and he lifted the pannikin of water to her lips.

"Cold enough?" he asked, and his wife nodded. "Abe fetches it as reg'lar as a clock."

"Where's Abe?" she asked, and her voice for all its feebleness had a youthful music in it.

"I heard him sayin' he was goin' down to the crick to cotch a fish. He reckoned you'd fancy a fish when you could eat a piece. He's a mighty thoughtful boy, our Abe. Then he was comin' to read to you. You'd like that, dearie?"

The sick woman made no sign. Her eyes were vacantly regarding the doorway.

"I've got to leave you now. I reckon I'll borrow the Dawneys' sorrel horse and ride into Gentryville. I've got the young hogs to sell, and I'll fetch back the corn-meal from Hicksons. Sally Hickson was just like you last Fall, and I want to find out from Jim how she got her strength up."

He put a hand on her brow and felt it cool.

"Glory! You're mendin' fast, Nancy gel. You'll be well in time to put up the berries that the children's picked."

He fished from below the bed a pair of skin brogues and slipped them on his feet.

"I'll be back before night."

"I want Abe," she moaned.

"I'll send him to you," he said as he went out.

Left alone, the woman lay still for a little in a stupor of weariness. Waves of that terrible lassitude, which is a positive anguish and not a mere absence of strength, flowed over her. The square of the doorway, which was directly before her eyes, began to take strange forms. It was filled with yellow sunlight, and a red glow beyond told of the sugar-maples at the edge of the clearing.

Now it seemed to her unquiet sight to be a furnace. Outside the world was burning; she could feel the heat of it in the close cabin. For a second acute fear startled her weakness. It passed, her eyes cleared and she saw the homely doorway as it was and heard the gobble of a turkey in the forest.

The fright had awakened her mind and senses. For the first time she fully realized her condition. Life no longer moved steadily in her body; it flickered and wavered and would soon gutter out.

Her eyes marked every detail of the squalor around her—the unwashed dishes, the foul earthen floor, the rotting applepile, the heap of rags which had been her only clothes.

She was leaving the world, and this was all she had won from it. Sheer misery forced a sigh which seemed to rend her frail body, and her eyes filled with tears. She had been a dreamer, an adept at make-believe, but the poor coverings she had wrought for a dingy reality were now too threadbare to hide it.

And once she had been so rich in hope. She would make her husband a great man and—when that was manifestly impossible without a rebirth of Tom Linkhorn—she would have a son who would wear a black coat like Lawyer Macneil and Colonel Hardin way back in Kentucky and make fine speeches, beginning, "Fellow countrymen and gentlemen of this famous State."

SHE had a passion for words, and sonorous phrases haunted her memory. She herself would have a silk gown and a bonnet with roses in it. Once long ago she had been to Elizabethtown and seen just such a gown and bonnet. Or Tom would be successful in this wild Indiana country and be like Daniel Boone the father of a new State and have places and towns called for him—a Nancyville, perhaps, or a Linkhorn County.

She knew about Daniel Boone, for her grandfather Hanks had been with him. And there had been other dreams, older dreams, dating far back to the days when she was a little girl with eyes like a brown owl. Some one had told her fairy-tales about princesses and knights, strange beings which she never quite understood but of which she made marvelous pictures in her head.

She had learned to read in order to follow up the doings of those queer bright folk, but she had never tracked them down again. But one book she had got called the "Pilgrim's Progress," printed in a far-away city called Philadelphia by missionaries, which told of things as marvelous and had pictures, too—one especially of a young man covered with tin, which she supposed was what they called armor. And there was another called the "Arabian Nights," a close-printed thing difficult to read by the Winter fire, full of wilder doings than any she could imagine for herself, but beautiful, too, and delicious to muse over, though Tom, when she read a chapter to him, had condemned it as a pack of lies.

Clearly there was a world somewhere, perhaps outside America altogether, far more wonderful than even the magnificence of Colonel Hardin. Once she had hoped to find it herself; then that her children should find it. And the end was this shack in the wilderness, a few acres of rotting crops, bitter starving Winters, Summers of fever, the depths of poverty, a penniless, futureless family, and for herself a coffin of green lumber and a yard or two of stony soil.

She saw everything now with the clear unrelenting eyes of childhood. The films she had woven for self-protection were blown aside. She was dying—she had often wondered how she should feel when dying—humble and trustful, she had hoped, for she was religious after a fashion and had dreamed herself into an affection for a kind, fatherly God.

But now all that had gone. She was bitter, like one defrauded. She had been promised something, and had struggled on in the assurance of it. And the result was nothing—nothing. Tragic tears filled her eyes. She had been so hungry, and there was to be no satisfying that hunger this side the grave or beyond it. She was going the same way as Betsy Sparrow, a death like a cow's, with nothing to show for life, nothing to leave. Betsy had been a poor crushed creature and had looked for no more. But she was different. She had been promised something, something fine—she couldn't remember what or who had promised it, but it had never been out of her mind.

There was the ring, too. No woman in Indiana had the like of that. An ugly thing, but very ancient and of pure gold. Once Tom had wanted to sell it when he was hard-pressed back at Nolin Creek, but she had fought for it like a tigress and scared the life out of Tom.

Her grandfather had left it to her because she was his favorite and it had been her grandmother's and long ago had come from Europe. It was lucky and could cure rheumatism, if worn next the heart in a skin bag. All her thoughts were suddenly set on the ring, her one poor shred of fortune, she wanted to feel it on her finger and press its cool gold with the queer markings on her eyelids.

But Tom had gone away and she couldn't reach the trunk in the corner. Tears trickled down her cheeks, and through the mist of them she saw that the boy Abe stood at the foot of the bed.

"Feelin' comfortabler?" he asked.

He had a harsh untunable voice, his father's, but harsher, and he spoke the drawling dialect of the backwoods.

His figure stood in the light, so that the dying mother saw only its outline. He was a boy about nine years old, but growing too fast, so that he had lost the grace of childhood and was already lanky and ungainly. As he turned his face crosswise to the light, he revealed a curiously rugged profile—a big nose springing sharply from the brow, a thick underhung lower lip and the beginning of a promising Adam's apple.

His stiff black hair fell round his great ears, which stood out like the handles of a pitcher. He was barefoot and wore a pair of leather breeches and a ragged homespun shirt. Beyond doubt he was ugly.

He moved round to the right side of the bed where he was wholly in shadow.

"My lines is settin' nicely," he said. "I'll have a fish for your supper. And then I'm goin' to take dad's gun and fetch you a turkey. You could eat a slice of a fat turkey, I reckon."

The woman did not answer, for she was thinking. This uncouth boy was the son she had put her faith in. She loved him best of all things on earth, but for the moment she saw him in the hard light of disillusionment. A loutish backwoods child, like Dennis Hanks or Tom Sparrow or anybody else.

He had been a comfort to her, for he had been quick to learn and had a strange womanish tenderness in his ways. But she was leaving him, and he would grow up like his father before him to a life of ceaseless toil with no daylight or honor in it. She almost hated the sight of him, for he was the memorial of her failure.

The boy did not guess these thoughts. He pulled up a stool and sat very close to the bed, holding his mother's frail wrist in a sunburned hand so big that it might have been that of a lad halfway through his teens. He had learned in the woods to be neat and precise in his ways, and his movements, for all his gawky look, were as soft as a panther's.

"Like me to tell you a story?" he asked. "What about Uncle Mord's tale of Dan'l Boone at the Blue Licks battle?"

There was no response, so he tried again.

"Or read a piece? It was the Bible last time, but the words is mighty difficult. Besides you don't need it that much now. You're gettin' better. Let's hear about the ol' Pilgrim."

He found a squat duodecimo in the trunk and shifted the skin curtain from one of the window-holes to get light to read by. His mother lay very still with her eyes shut, but he knew by her breathing that she was not asleep. He ranged through the book, stopping to study the crude pictures, and then started laboriously to read the adventures of *Christian* and *Hopeful* after leaving Vanity Fair—the mine of Demas, the plain called Ease, Castle Doubting and the Delectable Mountains. He boggled over some words, but on the whole he read well, and his harsh voice dropped into a pleasant sing-song.

By and by he noticed that his mother was asleep. He took the tin pannikin and filled it with fresh water from the spring. Then he kissed the hand which lay on the blanket, looked about guiltily to see if any one had seen him, for kisses were rare in that household, and tiptoed out again.

The woman slept, but not wholly. The doorway, which was now filled with the deep gold of the western sun, was still in her vision. It had grown to a great square of light, and instead of being blocked in the foreground by the forest, it seemed to give on an infinite distance. She had a sense not of looking out of a hut but of looking from without *into* a great chamber. Peace descended on her which she had never known before in her feverish dreams, peace and a happy expectation.

She had not listened to Abe's reading. but some words of it had caught her ear. The phrase "Delectable Mountains" for one. She did not know what "delectable" meant, but it sounded good; and mountains, though she had never seen more of them than a far blue line, had always pleased her fancy. Now she seemed to be looking at them through that magical doorway.

THE country was not like anything she remembered in the Kentucky bluegrass, still less like the shaggy woods of Indiana.

The turf was short and very green, and the hills fell into gracious folds that promised homesteads in every nook of them. It was a "delectable" country—yes, that was the meaning of the word that had puzzled her.

She had seen the picture before in her head. She remembered one hot Sunday afternoon when she was a child hearing a Baptist preacher discoursing on a Psalm, something about the "little hills rejoicing." She had liked the words and made a picture in her mind. These were the little hills and they were joyful.

There was a white road running straight through them till it disappeared over a crest. That was right, of course. The road which the Pilgrims traveled. And there, too, was a Pilgrim.

He was a long way off, but she could see him quite clearly. He was a boy, older than Abe, but about the same size—a somewhat forlorn figure, who seemed as if he had a great way to go and was oppressed by the knowledge of it. He had funny things on his legs and feet, which were not proper moccasins.

Once he looked back, and she had a glimpse of fair hair. He could not be any of the Hanks or Linkhorn kin, for they were all dark. But he had something on his left arm which she recognized—a thick ring of gold. It was her own ring, the ring she kept in the trunk, and she smiled comfortably. She had wanted it a little while ago, and now there it was before her eyes. She had no anxiety about its safety, for somehow it belonged to that little boy as well as to her.

His figure moved fast and soon was out of sight round a turn of the hill. And with that the landscape framed in the doorway began to waver and dislimn. The road was still there, white and purposeful, but the environs were changing. She was puzzled, but with a pleasant confusion. Her mind was not on the landscape, but on the people, for she was assured that others would soon appear on the enchanted stage.

Again it was a boy. He ran across the road, shouting with joy, a dog at his heels and a bow in his hand. Before he disappeared, she marked the ring, this time on his finger. He had scarcely gone ere another appeared on the road, a slim, pale child, dressed in some stuff that gleamed like satin and mounted on a pony. The spectacle delighted her, for it brought her in mind of the princes she had been told of in the fairy-tales. And there was the ring worn over a saffron riding-glove.

A sudden weakness made her swoon, and out of it she woke to a consciousness of the hut where she lay. She had thought she was dead and in heaven among fair children, and the waking made her long for her own child. Surely that was Abe in the doorway. No, it was a taller and older lad oddly dressed, but he had a look of Abe—something in the eyes. He was on the road, too, and marching purposefully—and he had the ring. Even in her mortal frailty she had a quickening of the heart. These strange people had something to do with her, something to tell her, and that something was about her son.

There was a new boy in the picture. A dejected child who rubbed the ring on his small breeches and played with it, looking up now and then with a frightened start. The woman's heart ached for him, for she knew her own life-long malady. He was hungry for something which he had small hope of finding.

And then a wind seemed to blow out of doors and the world darkened down to evening. But her eyes pierced the gloaming easily, and she saw very plain the figure of a man.

He was sitting hunched up with his face in his hands, gazing into vacancy. Without surprize she recognized something in his face that was her own. He wore the kind of hunter's clothes that old folk had worn in her childhood, and a long gun lay across his knees. His air was somber and wistful and yet with a kind of noble content in it. He had Abe's puckered-up lips and Abe's steady sad eyes.

Into her memory came a verse of the Scriptures which had always fascinated her.

> "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims upon the earth."

She saw it all in a flash of enlightenment. These seekers throughout the ages had been looking for something and had not found it. But Abe, her son, was to find it. That was why she had been sent those dreams.

Once again she looked through the door into bright sunshine. It was a place that she knew beside the Ohio—she remembered the tall poplar-clump. She did not see the Jacksons' farm which stood south of the trees, but there was the Indian graveyard, which as a little girl she had been afraid to pass.

Now it seemed to be fresh-made, for painted vermilion wands stood about the mounds. On one of them a gold trinket, tied by a loop of hide, rattled in the wind. It was her ring. The seeker lay buried there with the talisman above him.

SHE was awake now, oblivious of the swift sinking of her vital energy. She must have the ring, for it was the pledge of a great glory. A breathless little girl flung herself into the cabin. It was Sophy Hanks, one of the many nieces who squattered like ducks about the settlement.

"Mammy!" she cried shrilly. "Mammy Linkhorn!"

She stammered with the excitement of the bearer of ill news.

"Abe's lost your ring in the crick. He took it for a sinker to his lines, for Indian Jake telled him a piece of gold would cotch the grit fish. And a grit fish has cotched it. Abe's bin divin' and divin' and can't find it nohow. He reckons it's plumb lost. Ain't he a bad 'un, Mammy Linkhorn?"

It was some time before the dying woman understood. Then she began feebly to cry. For the moment her ring loomed large in her eyes: it was the earnest of the promise and without it the promise might fail. She had not strength to speak or even to sob, and the tears trickled over her cheeks in dumb impotent misery.

She was roused by the culprit Abe. He stood beside her with his wet hair streaked into a fringe along his brow. The skin of his neck glistened wet in the opening of his shirt. His cheeks too glistened, but not with the water of the creek. He was crying bitterly.

He had no words of explanation or defense. His thick underlip stuck out and gave him the appeal of a penitent dog; the tears had furrowed paler channels down grimy cheeks; he was the very incarnation of uncouth misery.

But his mother saw none of these things. On the instant he seemed to her transfigured. Something she saw in him of all the generations of pleading boys that had just passed before her, something of the stern confidence of the man over whose grave the ring had fluttered.

But more—far more. She was assured that the day of the Seeker had passed and that the Finder had come. The young features were transformed into the lines of a man's strength. The eyes dreamed but also commanded, the loose mouth had the gold of wisdom and the steel of resolution. The promise had not failed her.

She had won everything from life, for she had given the world a master. Words seemed to speak themselves in her ear:

> Bethink you of the blessedness. Every wife is like the Mother of God and has the hope of bearing a savior of mankind.

She lay very still in her great joy. The boy in a fright sprang to her side, knocking over the stool with the pannikin of water. He knelt on the floor and hid his face in the bedclothes. Her hand found his shaggy head.

Her voice was very faint now but he heard it.

"Don't cry, little Abe," she said. "Don't you worry about the ring, dearie. It ain't needed no more."

Half an hour later, when the cabin door was dim with twilight, the hand which the boy held grew cold.

The End of the Road*

The Last Tale in the Series, "The Path of a King." Each Story Entirely Complete in Itself

WHEN Edwin M. Stanton was associated at Cincinnati in 1857 with Abraham Lincoln in the great McCormick Reaper patent suit it was commonly assumed that this was the first time the two men had met. Such was Lincoln's view, for his memory was likely to have blind patches in it.

But in fact there had been a meeting fifteen years before, the recollection of which in Stanton's mind had been so overlaid by the accumulations of a busy life that it did not awake till after the President's death.

In the early fall of 1842 Stanton had occasion to visit Illinois. He was then twenty-five years of age and had already attained the position of leading lawyer in his native town of Steubenville in Ohio and acted as reporter of the Supreme Court of the State. He was a solemn, reserved young man, with a square, fleshy face and a strong, ill-tempered jaw. His tight lips curved downward at the corners and, combined with his bold eyes, gave him an air of peculiar shrewdness and purpose.

He did not forget that he came of good professional stock—New England on one side and Virginia on the other—and that he was college-bred, unlike the common backwoods attorney. Also he was resolved on a great career, with the White House at the end of it, and was ready to compel all whom he met to admit the justice of his ambition. The consciousness of uncommon talent and a shining future gave him a self-possession rare in a young man and a complacence not unlike arrogance. His dress suited his pretensions—the soft, rich broadcloth which tailors called doeskin, and linen of a fineness rare outside the Eastern cities. He was not popular in Ohio, but he was respected for his sharp tongue, subtle brain and intractable honesty.

His business finished, he had the task of filling up the evening, for he could not leave for home till the morrow. His host, Mr. George Curtin, was a little shy of his guest and longed profoundly to see the last of him. It was obvious that this alert lawyer regarded the Springfield folk as mossbacks—which might be well enough for St. Louis and Chicago but was scarcely becoming in a man from Steubenville. Another kind of visitor he might have taken to a chicken-fight, but one glance at Stanton precluded that solution. So he compromised on Speed's store.

"There are one or two prominent citizens gathered there most nights," he explained. "Like as not we'll find Mr. Lincoln. I reckon you've heard of Abe Lincoln?"

Mr. Stanton had not. He denied the imputation as if he were annoyed.

"Well, we think a mighty lot of him round here. He's Judge Logan's law-partner and considered one of the brightest in Illinois. He's been returned to the State Legislature two or three times, and he's a dandy on the stump. A hot Whig and none the worse for that, though I reckon them's not your politics.

"We're kind of proud of him in Sangamon County. No, not a native. Rode into this town one day five years since from New Salem with all his belongings in a saddle-bag and started business next morning in Joe Speed's back room.

"He's good company, Abe, for you never heard a better man to tell a story. You'd die of laughing. Though I did hear he was a sad man just now along of being crossed in love, so I can't promise you he'll be up to his usual, if he's at Speed's tonight."

"I suppose the requirements for a Western lawyer," said Mr. Stanton acidly, "are a gift of buffoonery and a reputation for gallantry."

HE WAS intensely bored and had small desire to make the acquaintance of provincial celebrities.

Mr. Curtin was offended but could think of no suitable retort, and as they were close on Speed's store, he swallowed his wrath and led the way through alleys of piled merchandise to the big room where the stove was lighted.

It was a chilly Fall night and the fire was welcome. Half a dozen men sat smoking round it, with rummers of reeking toddy at their elbows. They were ordinary citizens of the place, and they talked of the last horse-races. As the newcomers entered they were appealing to a figure perched on a high barrel to decide some point in dispute.

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* *See note to preceding story.*

This figure climbed down from its perch as they entered with a sort of awkward courtesy. It was a very tall man, thin almost to emaciation, with long arms and big hands and feet. He had a lean, powerful-looking head, marred by ugly projecting ears and made shapeless by a mass of untidy black hair.

The brow was broad and fine, and the dark eyes set deep under it; the nose, too, was good, but the chin and mouth were too small for the proportions of the face. The mouth, indeed, was so curiously puckered and the lower lip so thick and prominent as to give something of a comic effect. The skin was yellow, but stretched so firm and hard on the cheekbones that the sallowness did not look unhealthy. The man wore an old suit of blue jeans, and his pantaloons did not meet his coarse unblacked shoes by six inches. His scraggy throat was adorned with a black neckerchief like a boot-lace.

"Abe," said Mr. Curtin, "I would like to make you known to my friend Mr. Stanton of Ohio."

The queer face broke into a pleasant smile, and the long man held out his hand.

"Glad to know you, Mr. Stanton," he said, and then seemed to be stricken with shyness.

His wandering eye caught sight of a new patent churn which had just been added to Mr. Speed's stock. He took two steps to it and was presently deep in its mechanism. He turned it all ways, knelt beside it on the floor, took off the handle and examined it, while the rest of the company pressed Mr. Stanton to a seat by the fire.

"I heard Abe was out at Rochester helping entertain Ex-President Van Buren," said Mr. Curtin to the storekeeper.

"I reckon he was," said Speed. "He kept them roaring till morning. Judge Peck told me he allowed Mr. Van Buren would be stiff for a month with laughing at Abe's tales. It's curious that a man who don't use tobacco or whisky should be such mighty good company."

"I wish Abe'd keep it up," said another. "Most of the time now he goes about like a sick dog. What's come to him, Joe?"

Mr. Speed hushed his voice.

"He's got his own troubles. He's a deep-feeling man and can't forget easily like you and me. But things is better with him, and I kind of hope to see him wed by Thanksgiving Day.

"Look at him with that churn. He's that inquisitive he can't keep his hands off no new thing."

But the long man had finished his inquiry and rejoined the group by the stove.

"I thought you were a lawyer, Mr. Lincoln," said Stanton, "but you seem to have the tastes of a mechanic."

The other grinned.

"I've a fancy for any kind of instrument, for I was a surveyor in this county before I took to the law."

"George Washington also was a surveyor."

"Also, but not *likewise.* I don't consider I was much of a hand with the compass and chains."

"It is the fashion in Illinois, I gather, for the law to be the last in a series of many pursuits—the pool where the driftwood from many streams comes to rest."

MR. STANTON spoke with the superior air of one who took his profession seriously and had been trained for it in the orthodox fashion.

"It was so in my case. I've kept a post-office and I've had a store and I've had a tavern and I kept them so darned bad that I'm still paying off the debts I made in them."

The long man made the confession with a comic simplicity.

"There's a deal to be said for the habit," said Speed. "Having followed other trades teaches a lawyer something about human nature. I reckon Abe wouldn't be the man he is if he had studied his books all his days."

"There is another side to that," said Mr. Stanton, and his precise accents and well-modulated voice seemed foreign in that homely place.

"You are also a politician, Mr. Lincoln?"

The other nodded.

"Of a kind. I'm a Henry Clay man."

"Well, there I oppose you. I'm no Whig or lover of Whigs. But I'm a lover of the Constitution and the law of the country;

and that Constitution and that country are approaching perilous times. There's explosive stuff about which is going to endanger the stability of the noble heritage we have received from our fathers, and if that heritage is to be saved it can only be by those who hold fast to its eternal principles.

"This land can only be saved by its lawyers, sir. But they must be lawyers profoundly read in the history and philosophy of their profession and no catchpenny advocates with a glib tongue and an elastic conscience. The true lawyer must approach his task with reverence and high preparation, for as his calling is the noblest of human activities, so it is the most exacting."

The *point-device* young man spoke with a touch of the schoolmaster, but his audience, who had an inborn passion for fine words, were impressed. Lincoln sat squatted on his heels on a bit of sacking, staring into the open door of the stove.

"There's truth in that," he said slowly.

His voice had not the mellow tones of the other's, being inclined to shrillness, but it gave the impression of great power waiting in release somewhere in his massive chest.

"But I reckon 'tis only half the truth, for truth's like a dollar-piece—it's got two sides, and both are wanted to make it good currency. The law and the Constitution are like a child's pants—they've got to be made wider and longer as the child grows so as to fit him. If they're kept too tight he'll burst them, and if you're in a hurry and make them too big all at once they'll trip him up."

"Agreed," said Stanton, "but the fashion and the fabric should be kept of the same good American pattern."

The long man ran a hand through his thatch of hair.

"There's only one fashion in pants—to make them comfortable. And some day that boy is going to grow so big you won't be able to make the old ones do and he'll have to get a new pair. If he's living on a farm he'll want the same kind of good working-pants, but for all that they'll have to be new-made."

Mr. Stanton laughed with some irritation.

"I hate arguing in parables, for in the nature of things they can't be exact. That's a mistake you Westerners make. The law must change in detail with changing conditions, but its principles can not alter, and the respect for these principles is our only safeguard against a relapse into savagery.

"Take slavery. There are fools in the East who would abolish it by act of Congress. For myself I do not love the system, but I love anarchy and injustice less, and if you abolish slavery you abolish also every right of legal property, and that means chaos and barbarism. A free people such as ours can not thus put the knife to their throat. If we were the serfs of a monarchy, accustomed to bow before the bidding of a king, it might be different, but a republic can not do injustice to one section of its citizens without destroying itself."

Lincoln had not taken his eyes from the stove. He seemed to be seeing things in the fire, for he smiled to himself.

"Well," he drawled, "I reckon that some day we may have to find some sort of a king. The new pants have got to be made."

Mr. Stanton shrugged his shoulders, and the other, quick to detect annoyance, scrambled to his feet and stood looking down from his great height at his dapper antagonist. A kindly, quizzical smile lighted his homely face.

"We'll quit arguing, Mr. Stanton, for I admit I'm afraid of you. You're some years younger than I, but I expect you would have me convinced on your side if we went on. And maybe I'd convince you too, and then we'd be like old Jim Fletcher at New Salem.

"You'll have heard about Jim. He had a mighty quarrel with his neighbor about a hog, Jim alleging it was one of his lot and the neighbor claiming it for his. Well, they argued and argued, and the upshot was that Jim convinced the neighbor that the hog was Jim's and the neighbor convinced Jim that the hog was the neighbor's, and neither of them would touch that hog, and they were worse friends than ever."

Mr. Curtin rose and apologized to his companion. He had to see a man about a buggy, and must leave Mr. Stanton to find his way back alone.

"Don't worry, George," said the long man. "I'm going round your way, and I'll see your friend home."

AS MR. STANTON professed himself ready for bed, the little party by the stove broke up. Lincoln fetched from a corner a dilapidated carpet-bag full of papers, and an old green umbrella, handleless, tied with string about the middle, and having his name sewn inside in straggling letters cut out of white muslin. He and Stanton went out of doors into the raw Autumn night.

The town lay very quiet in a thin fog made luminous by a full moon. The long man walked with his feet turned a little inward, accommodating his gait to the shorter stride of his companion. Mr. Stanton, having recovered from his momentary annoyance, was curious about this odd member of his own profession. Was it possible that in the whirligig of things a future could lie before one so uncouth and rustical? A democracy was an unaccountable thing, and these rude Westerners might have to be reckoned with.

"You are ambitious of a political career, Mr. Lincoln?" he asked.

The other looked down with his shy, crooked smile, and the Ohio lawyer suddenly realized that the man had his own attractiveness.

"Why, no, sir. I shouldn't like to say I was ambitious. I've no call to be, for the Almighty hasn't blessed me with any special gifts. You're different. It would be a shame to you if you didn't look high, for you're a young man with all the world before you. I'm getting middle-aged, and I haven't done anything to be proud of yet, and I reckon I won't get the chance, and if I did I couldn't take advantage of it. I'm pretty fond of the old country, and if she wants me, why, she's only got to say so and I'll do what she tells me. But I don't see any clear road I want to travel——"

He broke off suddenly, and Stanton, looking up at him, saw that his face had changed utterly. The patient, humorous look had gone, and it was like a tragic mask, drawn and strained with suffering. They were passing by the little town cemetery and, as if by some instinct, had halted.

The place looked strange and pitiful in the hazy moonlight. It was badly tended, and most of the headstones were only of painted wood, warped and buckled by the weather. But in the dimness the rows of crosses and slabs seemed to extend into the far distance, and the moon gave them a cold, eery whiteness, as if they lay in the light of another world.

A great sigh came from Lincoln, and Stanton thought that he had never seen on mortal countenance such infinite sadness.

"Ambition!" he said. "How dare we talk of ambition, when this is the end of it? All these people—decent people, kind people, once full of joy and purpose, and now all forgotten! It is not the buried bodies I mind. It is the buried hearts. I wonder if it means peace——"

He stood there with head bowed, and he seemed to be speaking to himself. Stanton caught a phrase or two and found it was verse—banal verses, which his fly-paper memory had once culled from a weekly journal.

Tell me, my secret soul (it ran)
Oh, tell me, Hope and Faith,
Is there no resting-place
From sorrow, sin and death?
Is there no happy spot
Where mortals may be blessed,
Where grief may find a balm
And weariness a rest?

The figure, murmuring these lines, seemed to be oblivious of his companion. He stood gazing under the moon, like a gaunt statue of Melancholy. Stanton spoke to him but got no answer, and presently took his own road home.

He had no taste for histrionic scenes. And as he went his way he meditated. Mad, beyond doubt. Not without power in him, but unbalanced, hysterical, alternating between buffoonery and these schoolgirl emotions. He reflected that if the American nation contained much stuff of this kind it might prove a difficult team to drive. He was thankful that he was going home next day to his orderly life.

II

EIGHTEEN years have gone, and the lanky figure of Speed's store is revealed in new surroundings. In a big, square room two men sat beside a table littered with the débris of pens, foolscap and torn fragments of paper which marked the end of a council.

It was an evening at the beginning of April, and a fire burned in the big grate. One of the two sat at the table with his elbows on the mahogany and his head supported by a hand. He was a man well on in middle life with a fine, clean-cut face and the shapely, mobile lips of the publicist and orator. It was the face of one habituated to platforms and assemblies, full of a certain self-conscious authority.

But tonight its possessor seemed ill at ease. His cheeks were flushed and his eye distracted.

The other had drawn his chair to the fire, so that one side of him was lighted by the late Spring sun and one by the glow from the hearth. That figure we first saw in the Springfield store had altered little in the eighteen years. There was no gray in the coarse black hair, but the lines in the sallow face were deeper, and there were dark rings under the hollow eyes. The old suit of blue jeans had gone, and he wore now a frock coat obviously new, which was a little too full for his gaunt frame. His tie as of old was like a boot-lace. A new silk hat with the nap badly ruffled stood near on the top of a cabinet.

He smiled rather wearily.

"We're pretty near through the appointments now, Mr. Secretary. It's a mean business, but I'm a minority President and I've got to move in zigzags so long as I don't get off the pike. I reckon that honest statesmanship is just the employment of individual meanness for the public good. Mr. Sumner wouldn't agree. He calls himself the slave of principles and says he owns no other master. Mr. Sumner's my notion of a bishop."

The other did not seem to be listening.

"Are you still set on reenforcing Fort Sumter?" he asked, his bent brows making a straight line above his eyes.

Lincoln nodded. He was searching in the inside pocket of his frock coat, from which he extracted a bundle of papers. Seward saw what he was after, and his self-consciousness increased.

"You have read my letter?" he asked.

"I have," said Lincoln, fixing a pair of cheap spectacles on his nose.

He had paid thirty-seven cents for them in Bloomington five years before.

"A mighty fine letter. Full of horse sense."

"You agree with it?" asked the other eagerly.

"Why, no. I don't agree with it; but I admire it a lot, and I admire its writer."

"Mr. President," said Seward solemnly, "on one point I am adamant. We can not suffer the dispute to be about slavery. If we fight on that issue we shall have the Border States against us."

"I'm thinking all the time about the Border States. We've got to keep them. If there's going to be trouble I'd like to have the Almighty on my side, but I must have Kentucky."

"And yet you will go forward about Sumter, which is regarded by every one as a slavery issue."

"The issue is as God has made it. You can't go past the bed-rock facts. I am the trustee for the whole property of the nation, of which Sumter is a piece, and if I give up one stick or stone to a rebellious demand I am an unfaithful steward. Surely, Mr. Secretary, if you want to make the issue union or disunion you can't give up Sumter without fatally prejudicing your case."

"It means war."

Lincoln looked again at the document in his hand.

"It appears that you are thinking of war in any event. You want to pick a quarrel with France over Mexico and with Spain over St. Domingo and unite the nation in a war against foreigners. I tell you honestly I don't like the proposal. It seems to me downright wicked. If the Lord sends me war we have got to face it like men, but God forbid we should manufacture war and use it as an escape from our domestic difficulties. You can't expect a blessing on that."

The Secretary of State flushed.

"Have you considered the alternative, Mr. President?" he cried. "It is civil war, war between brothers in blood. So soon as the South fires a shot against Sumter the sword is unsheathed. You can not go back then."

"I am fully aware of it. I haven't been sleeping much lately, and I've been casting up my accounts. It's a pretty weak balance-sheet. I would like to tell you the main items, Mr. Secretary, so that you may see that I'm not walking this road blindfold."

THE other had pushed back his chair from the table with a gesture of despair. But he listened. Lincoln had risen and stood in front of the fire, his shoulders leaning on the mantelpiece and his head against the lower part of the picture of George Washington.

"First," he said, "I'm a minority President, elected by a minority vote of the people of the United States. I wouldn't have got in if the Democrats hadn't been split. I haven't a majority in the Senate. Yet I've got to decide for the nation and make the nation follow me. Have I the people's confidence? I reckon I haven't—yet. I haven't even got the confidence of the Republican party."

Seward made no answer. He clearly assented.

"Next, I haven't got much in the way of talents. I reckon Jeff Davis a far abler man than I. My friends tell me I haven't the presence and dignity for a President. My shaving-glass tells me I'm a common-looking fellow."

He stopped and smiled.

"But perhaps the Lord prefers common-looking people, and that's why he made so many of them.

"Next," he went on, "I've a heap of critics and a lot of enemies. Some good men say I've no experience in government, and that's about true. Up in New England the papers are asking who is this political huckster, this county court advocate? Mr. Stanton says I'm an imbecile, and when he's cross calls me the original gorilla, and wonders why fools wander about in Africa when they could find the beast they're looking for in Washington. The pious everywhere don't like me, because I don't hold that national policy can be run on the lines of a church meeting. And the radicals are looking for me with a gun, because I'm not prepared right here and now to abolish slavery. One of them calls me 'the slave-hound of Illinois.' I'd like to meet that man, for I guess he must be a humorist."

Mr. Seward leaned forward and spoke earnestly.

"Mr. President, no man values your great qualities more than I do or reprobates more heartily such vulgar libels. But it is true that you lack executive experience. I have been the governor of the biggest State in the Union and possess some knowledge of the task. It is all at your service. Will you not allow me to ease your burden?"

Lincoln smiled down kindly upon the other.

"I thank you with all my heart. You have touched on that matter in your letter. But, Mr. Secretary, in the inscrutable providence of God it is I who have been made President. I can not shirk the duty. I look to my Cabinet, and notably to you, for advice and loyal assistance, and I am confident that I shall get it. But in the end I and I only must decide."

Seward looked up at the grave face and said nothing. Lincoln went on:

"I have to make a decision which may bring war—civil war. I don't know anything about war, though I served a month or two in the Black Hawk campaign, and yet if war comes I am the Commander-in-Chief of the Union. Who among us knows anything of the business? General Scott is an old man, and he doesn't just see eye to eye with me; for I'm told he talks about 'letting the wayward sisters go in peace.'

"Our Army and Navy's nothing much to boast of, and the South is far better prepared. You can't tell how our people will take war, for they're all pulling different ways just now. Blair says the whole North will spring to arms, but I guess they've first got to find the arms to spring to.

"I was reviewing some militia the other day, and they looked a deal more like a Fourth of July procession than a battle-field. Yes, Mr. Secretary, if we have to fight, we've first got to make an army."

"Remember, too, that it will be civil war—kin against kin, brother against brother."

"I remember. All war is devilish, but ours will be the most devilish that the world has ever known. It isn't only the feeding of fresh young boys to rebel batteries that grieves me, though God knows that's not a thing that bears thinking about. It's the bitterness and hate within the people. Will it ever die down, Mr. Secretary?"

LINCOLN was very grave, and his face was set like a man in anguish. Seward, deeply moved, rose and stood beside him, laying a hand on his shoulder.

"And for what, Mr. President?" he cried. "That is the question I ask myself. We are faced by such a problem as no man ever before had to meet. If five and a half million white men deeply in earnest are resolved to secede, is there any power on earth that can prevent them? You may beat them in battle, but can you ever force them again inside the confines of the nation? Remember Chatham's saying:

'Conquer a free population of three million souls—the thing is impossible.' They stand on the rights of democracy, the right of self-government, the right to decide their own future."

Lincoln passed a hand over his brow. His face had suddenly become very worn and weary.

"I've been pondering a deal over the position of the South," he said. "I reckon I see their point of view, and I'll not deny there's sense in it. There's truth in their doctrine of State-rights, but they've got it out of focus. If I had been raised in South Carolina, loving the slave-system because I had grown up with it and thinking more of my State than of the American nation, maybe I'd have followed Jeff Davis. I'm not saying there's no honesty in the South; I'm not saying there's not truth on their side; but I do say that ours is the bigger truth and the better truth. I hold that a nation is too sacred a thing to monkey with—even for good reasons. Why, man, if you once grant the right of a minority to secede, you make popular government foolish. I'll be willing to fight to prevent democracy becoming a laughing-stock."

"It's a fine point to make war about," said the other.

"Most true points are fine points. There never was a dispute between mortals where both sides hadn't a bit of right. I admit that the margin is narrow, but if it's made of good rock, it's sufficient to give us a foothold. We've got to settle once for all the question whether in a free government the minority have a right to break up the government whenever they choose. If we fail, then we must conclude that we've been all wrong from the start and that the people need a tyrant, being incapable of governing themselves."

Seward wrung his hands.

"If you put it that way I can not confute you. But, oh, Mr. President, is there not some means of building a bridge? I can not think that honest Southerners would force war on such a narrow issue."

"They wouldn't but for this slavery. It is that accursed system that obscures their reason. If they fight, the best of them will fight out of a mistaken loyalty to their State, but most will fight for the right to keep their slaves. If you are to have bridges, you must have solid ground at both ends.

"I've heard a tale of some church-members that wanted to build a bridge over a dangerous river. Brother Jones suggested one Myers, and Myers answered that, if necessary, he could build one to ——. This alarmed the church-members and Jones, to quiet them, said he believed his friend Myers was so good an architect that he could do it if he said he could, though he felt bound himself to express some doubt about the abutment on the infernal side."

A queer quizzical smile had relieved the gravity of the President's face. But Seward was in no mood for tales.

"Is there no other way?" he moaned, and his suave voice sounded cracked and harsh.

"There is no other way but to go forward. I've never been a man for cutting across lots when I could go round by the road, but if the roads are all shut, we must take to open country. For it is altogether necessary to go forward."

Seward seemed to pull himself together. He took a turn down the room and then faced Lincoln.

"Mr. President," he said "you do not know whether you have a majority behind you even in the North. You have no experience of government and none of war. The ablest men in your party are lukewarm or hostile toward you. You have no army and navy to speak of, and will have to make everything from the beginning. You feel as I do about the horror of war, and above all the horrors of civil war. You do not know whether the people will support you.

"You grant that there is some justice in the contention of the South, and you claim for your own case only a balance of truth. You admit that to coerce the millions of the South back into the Union is a kind of task which has never been performed in the world before and one which the wise of all ages have pronounced impossible.

"And yet for the sake of a narrow point you are ready, if the need arises, to embark on a war which must be bloody and long, which must stir the deeps of bitterness, and which in all likelihood will achieve nothing. Are you entirely resolved?"

Lincoln's sad eyes rested on the other.

"I am entirely resolved. I have been set here to decide for the people according to the best of my talents, and the Almighty has shown me no other road."

Seward held out his hand.

"Then, by ——, you must be right. You are the bravest man in this land, sir, and I will follow you to the other side of perdition."

III

THE time is two years later—a warm evening in early May. There had been no rain for a week in Washington, and the President, who had ridden in from his Summer quarters in the Soldiers' Home, had his trousers gray with dust from the knees down.

He had come round to the War Department, from which in these days he was never long absent, and found the Secretary of War busy as usual at his high desk. There had been the shortest of greetings, and while Lincoln turned over the last telegrams, Stanton wrote steadily.

Stanton had changed much since the night in the Springfield store. A square beard streaked with gray covered his chin, and his face had grown heavier. There were big pouches below the short-sighted eyes and deep lines on each side of his short, shaven upper lip. His skin had an unhealthy pallor, like that of one who works late and has little fresh air. The mouth, always obstinate, was now molded into a settled grimness. The plows of war had made deep furrows on his soul.

Lincoln, too, had altered. He had got a stoop in his shoulders, as if his back carried a heavy burden. A beard had been suffered to grow in a ragged fringe about his jaw and cheeks, and there were silver threads in it. His whole face seemed to have been pinched and hammered together, so that it looked like a mask of pale bronze —a death-mask, for it was hard to believe that blood ran below that dry tegument.

But the chief change was in his eyes. They had lost the alertness they once possessed and had become pits of brooding shade, infinitely kind, infinitely patient, infinitely melancholy.

Yet there was a kind of weary peace in the face, and there was still humor in the puckered mouth and even in the sad eyes. He looked less harassed than the Secretary of War. He drew a small book from his pocket, at which the other glanced malevolently.

"I give you fair warning, Mr. President," said Stanton, "if you've come here to read me the work of one of your tom-fool funny men, I'll fling it out of the window."

"This work is the Bible," said Lincoln with the artlessness of a mischievous child. "I looked in to ask how the draft was progressing."

"It starts in Rhode Island on July 7th, and till it starts I can say nothing. We've had warning that there will be fierce opposition in New York. It may mean that we have a second civil war on our hands. And of one thing I am certain—it will cost you your reelection."

The President did not seem perturbed.

"In this war we've got to take one step at a time," he said. "Our first duty is to save the country, and to do that we've got to win battles. But you can't win battles without armies, and if men won't enlist of their own will, they've got to be compelled. What use is a second term to me if I have no country? You're not weakening on the policy of the draft, Mr. Stanton?"

The Secretary of War shrugged his shoulders.

"No. In March it seemed inevitable. I still think it is essential, but I am forced to admit the possibility that it may be a sad failure. It is the boldest step you have taken, Mr. President. Have you ever regretted it?"

Lincoln shook his head.

"It don't do to start regretting. This war is managed by the Almighty, and if it's His purpose that we should win, he will show us how. I regard our fallible reasoning and desperate conclusions as part of His way of achieving His purpose.

"But about that draft. I'll answer you in the words of a young Quaker woman who against the rules had married a military man. The elders asked her if she was sorry, and she replied that she couldn't truly say that she was sorry, but that she could say she wouldn't do it again. I was for the draft and I was for the war, to prevent democracy making itself foolish."

"You'll never succeed in that," said Stanton gravely. "If Congress is democracy, there can't be a more foolish gathering outside a monkey-house."

THE President grinned broadly. He was humming the air of a nigger-song, "The Blue-Tailed Fly," which Sam Lamon had taught him.

"That reminds me of Artemus Ward.

He observes that at the last election he voted for Henry Clay. 'It's true,' he says, 'that Henry was dead, but since all the politicians that he knew were fifteenth-rate, he preferred to vote for a first class corpse.' "

Stanton moved impatiently. He hated the President's pocket humorists and had small patience with his tales.

"Was ever a great war fought," he cried, "with such a camp-following as our Congressmen?"

Lincoln looked comically surprized.

"You're too harsh, Mr. Stanton. I admit there are one or two crooks who could take shelter behind a corkscrew. But the trouble is that most of them are too high-principled. They are that set on liberty that they won't take the trouble to safeguard it. They would rather lose the war than give up their little notions. I've a great regard for principles, but I have no use for them when they get so high that they become foolishness."

"Every idle pedant thinks he knows better how to fight a war than the men who are laboring sixteen hours a day at it," said Stanton bitterly.

"They want to hurry things quicker than the Almighty means them to go. I don't altogether blame them either, for I'm mortally impatient myself. But it's no good thinking that saying a thing should be so will make it so.

"We're not the Creator of this universe. You've got to judge results according to your instruments. Horace Greeley is always telling me what I should do, but Horace omits to explain how I am to find the means. You can't properly manure a fifty-acre patch with only a bad smell."

Lincoln ran his fingers over the leaves of the small Bible he had taken from his pocket.

"Seems to me Moses had the same difficulties to contend with. Read the sixteenth chapter of the Book of Numbers at your leisure, Mr. Secretary. It's mighty pertinent to our situation. The people have been a deal kinder to me than I deserve and I've got more cause for thankfulness than complaint.

"But sometimes I get just a little out of patience with our critics. I want to say to them as Moses said to Korah, Dathan and Abiram—

" 'Ye take too much upon you, ye sons of Levi!' "

Lincoln's speech had broadened into something like the dialect of his boyhood. Stanton finished the paper on which he had been engaged and stepped aside from his desk. His face was heavily preoccupied, and he kept an eye always on the door leading to his private secretary's room.

"At this moment," Stanton said, "Hooker is engaged with Lee."

He put a finger on a map which was stretched on a frame behind him.

"There! On the Rappahannock, where it is joined by the Rapidan. Near the hamlet of Chancellorsville. Battle was joined two days ago, and so far it has been indecisive. Tonight we should know the result. That was the news you came here tonight about, Mr. President."

Lincoln nodded.

"I am desperately anxious. I needn't conceal that from you, Mr. Stanton."

"So am I. I wish to God I had more confidence in General Hooker. I never liked that appointment, Mr. President. I should have preferred Meade or Reynolds. Hooker is a blustering, thick-headed fellow, good enough maybe for a division or even a corps, but not for an army."

"I visited him three weeks back," said Lincoln, "and I'm bound to say he has marvelously pulled round the Army of the Potomac. There's a new spirit in their ranks. You're unjust to Joe Hooker, Mr. Stanton. He's a fine organizer, and he'll fight—he's eager to fight, which McClellan and Burnside never were."

"But what on earth is the good of being willing to fight if you're going to lose? He hasn't the brains to command. And he's opposed by Lee and Jackson. Do you realize the surpassing ability of those two men? We have no generals fit to hold a candle to them."

"We've a bigger and a better army. I'm not going to be depressed, Mr. Stanton. Joe has two men to every one of Lee's; he's safe over the Rappahannock, and I reckon he will make a road to Richmond. I've seen his troops, and they are fairly bursting to get at the enemy. I insist on being hopeful. What's the last news from the Mississippi?"

"Nothing new. Grant has got to Port Gibson and has his base at Grand Gulf. He now proposes to cut loose and make for Vicksburg. So far he has done well, but the risk is terrific. Still, I am inclined to think you were right about that man. He has capacity."

"Grant stops still and saws wood," said Lincoln. "He don't talk a great deal, but he fights. I can't help feeling hopeful tonight, for it seems to me we have the enemy in a fix. You've heard me talk of the shrinking quadrilateral, which is the rebel States, as I see the proposition."

"Often," said the other dryly.

"I never could get McClellan rightly to understand it. I look on the Confederacy as a quadrilateral of which at present we hold two sides—the east and the south—the salt-water sides. The north side is Virginia, the west side the line of the Mississippi. If Grant and Farragut between them can win the control of the Father of Waters, we've got the west side. Then it's the business of the Armies on the Mississippi to press east and the Army of the Potomac to press south.

"It may take time, but if we keep a stiff upper lip we're bound to have the rebels whipped. I reckon they're whipped already in spite of Lee. I've heard of a turtle that an old nigger man decapitated. Next day he was amusing himself poking sticks at it and the turtle was snapping back. His master comes along and says to him, 'Why, Pomp, I thought that turtle was dead.' 'Well, he am dead, massa,' says Pompey, 'but the critter don't know enough ter be sensible ob it.' I reckon the Confederacy's dead, but Jeff Javis don't know enough to be sensible of it."

A YOUNG man in uniform came hurriedly through the private secretary's door and handed the Secretary of War a telegram. He stood at attention, and the President observed that his face was pale. Stanton read the message, but gave no sign of its contents. He turned to the map behind him and traced a line on it with his forefinger.

"Any more news?" he asked the messenger.

"Nothing official, sir," was the answer. "But there is a report that General Jackson has been killed in the moment of victory."

The officer withdrew and Stanton turned to the President. Lincoln's face was terrible in its strain, for the words "in the moment of victory" had rung the knell of his hopes.

When Stanton spoke his voice was controlled and level.

"Unlike your turtle," he said, "the Confederacy is suddenly and terribly alive. Lee has whipped Hooker to blazes. We have lost more than fifteen thousand men. Today we are back on the north side of the Rappahannock."

Lincoln was on his feet, and for a moment the bronze mask of his face was distorted by suffering.

"My God!" he cried. "What will the country say? What will the country say?"

"It matters little what the country says. The point is, what will the country suffer? In a fortnight Lee will be in Maryland and Pennsylvania. Your quadrilaterial will not shrink—it will extend. In a month we shall be fighting to hold Washington and Baltimore—aye, and Philadelphia. That is the doing of the general of your choice, Mr. President."

The bitterness of the words seemed to calm Lincoln. He was walking up and down the floor with his hands clasped behind his back, and his expression was once again one of patient humility.

"I take all the blame," he said. "You have done nobly, Mr. Stanton, and all the mistakes are mine. I reckon I am about the poorest effigy of a war President that ever cursed an unhappy country."

The other did not reply. He was an honest man who did not deal in smooth phrases.

"I'd resign tomorrow," Lincoln went on. "No rail-splitter ever laid down his ax at the end of a hard day so gladly as I would lay down my high office. But I've got to be sure first that my successor will keep faith with this nation. I've got to find a man who will keep the right course."

"Which is?" Stanton asked.

"To fight it out to the very end. To the last drop of blood and the last cent. There can be no going back. If I surrendered my post to any successor, though he were an archangel from heaven, who would weaken on that great purpose, I should deserve to be execrated as the betrayer of my country."

Into Stanton's sour face there came a sudden gleam which made it almost beautiful.

"Mr. President," he said, "I have often differed from you. I have used great freedom in criticism of your acts, and I take leave to think that I have been generally in the right. You know that I am no flatterer. But I tell you, sir, from my inmost heart that you are the only man to lead the people, because you are the only man whose courage never fails. God knows how you manage it. I am of the bull-dog type and hold on because I do not know how to let go. Most of my work I do in utter hopelessness.

"But you, sir, you never come within a mile of despair. The blacker the clouds get, the more confident you are that there is sunlight behind them. I carp and cavil at you, but I also take off my hat to you, for you are by far the greatest of us."

Lincoln's face broke into a slow smile, which made the eyes seem curiously childlike.

"I thank you, my old friend," he said. "I don't admit I have your courage, for I haven't half of it. But if a man feels that he's only a pipe for Omnipotence to sound through, he is not so apt to worry. Besides, these last weeks God has been very good to me and I've been given a kind of assurance.

"I know the country will grumble a bit about my ways of doing things but will follow me in the end. I know that we shall win a clean victory. Jordan has been a hard road to travel, but I feel that in spite of all our frailties we'll be dumped on the right side of that stream. After that——"

"After that," said Stanton with something like enthusiasm in his voice, "you'll be the first President of a truly united America, with a power and prestige the greatest since Washington."

Lincoln's gaze had left the other's face and was fixed on the blue dusk now gathering in the window.

"I don't know about that," he said. "When the war's over I think I'll go home."

IV

TWO years passed, and once again it was Spring in Washington—about half-past ten of the evening of the fourteenth of April—Good Friday—the first Easter-tide of peace. The streets had been illuminated for victory, and the gas jets were still blazing, while a young moon climbing the sky was dimming their murky yellow with its cold, pure light. Tenth Street was packed from end to end by a silent mob. As a sponge cleans a slate so exhilaration had been wiped off their souls.

On the porch of Ford's Theater some gaudy posters advertised Tom Taylor's comedy "Our American Cousin," and the steps were littered with paper and orange-peel and torn fragments of women's clothes, for the exit of the audience had been hasty. Lights still blazed in the building, for there was nobody to put them out. In front on the sidewalk was a cordon of soldiers.

Stanton elbowed his way through the throngs to the little house, Mr. Peterson's, across the street. The messenger from the War Department had poured wild news into his ear—wholesale murder—everybody—the President—Seward—Grant. Incredulous, he had hurried forth, and the sight of that huge, still crowd woke fear in him. The guards at Mr. Peterson's door had recognized him, and he was admitted. As he crossed the threshold he saw ominous, dark stains.

A kitchen candle burned below the hat-rack in the narrow hall, and showed further stains on the oilcloth. From a room on the left hand came the sound of women weeping.

The door of the room at the end of the passage was ajar. It was a bare little place, once perhaps the surgery of some doctor of small practise, but now a bedroom. A door gave at the farther side on a small veranda, and this and the one window were wide open. An oil lamp stood on a table by the bed and revealed a crowd of people. A man lay on the camp-bed, lying aslant, for he was too long for it. A sheet covered his lower limbs, but his breast and shoulders had been bared. The head was nearest to the entrance, propped on an outjutting bolster.

A man was leaving whom Stanton recognized as Doctor Stone, the Lincoln family physician. The doctor answered his unspoken question.

"Dying," he said. "Through the brain. The bullet is now below the left eye. He may live for a few hours—scarcely the night."

Stanton moved to the foot of the bed like one in a dream. He saw that Barnes, the surgeon-general, sat on a deal chair on the left side holding the dying man's hand. Doctor Gurley, the minster, sat beside the bed. He noted Sumner and Welles and General Halleck and Governor Dennison, and back in the gloom the young Robert Lincoln. But he observed them only as he would have observed figures in a picture.

They were but shadows; the living man was he who was struggling on the bed with Death.

LINCOLN'S great arms and chest were naked, and Stanton, who had thought of him as meagre and shrunken, was amazed at their sinewy strength. He remembered that he had once heard of him as a village Hercules. The President was unconscious, but some tortured nerve made him moan like an animal in pain.

It was a strange sound to hear from one who had been wont to suffer with tight lips. To Stanton it heightened the spectral unreality of the scene. He seemed to be looking at a death in a stage tragedy.

The trivial voice of Welles broke the silence. He had to give voice to the emotion which choked him.

"His dream has come true," he said. "The dream he told us about at the Cabinet this morning. His ship is nearing the dark shore. He thought it signified good news from Sherman."

Stanton did not reply. To save his life he could not have uttered a word.

Then Gurley, the minister, spoke very gently, for he was a simple man sorely moved.

"He has looked so tired for so long. He will have rest now, the deep rest of the people of God. He has died for us all. Today nineteen hundred years ago the Son of Man gave his life for the world. The President has followed in his Master's steps."

Sumner was repeating softly to himself, like a litany, that sentence from the Second Inaugural Address, "With malice toward none, with charity for all."

But Stanton was in no mood for words. He was looking at the figure on the bed, the great chest heaving with the labored but regular breath, and living again the years of colleagueship and conflict. He had been loyal to him. Yes, thank God, he had been loyal! He had quarreled, thwarted, criticized, but he had never failed him in a crisis. He had held up his hands as Aaron and Hur held up the hands of Moses.

The Secretary of War was not in the habit of underrating his own talents and achievements. But in that moment they seemed less than nothing. Humility shook him like a passion. Till his dying day his one boast must be that he had served that figure on the camp-bed.

It had been his high fortune to have his lot cast in the vicinity of supreme genius. With awe he realized that he was looking upon the passing of the very great. There had never been such a man. There could never be such an one again. So patient and enduring, so wise in all great matters, so potent to inspire a multitude, so secure in his own soul.

Fools would chatter about his being a son of the people and his career a triumph of the average man. Average! Great God, he was a ruler of princes, a master, a compeller of men. He could imagine what noble nonsense Sumner would talk. He looked with disfavor at the classic face of the Bostonian.

But Sumner for once seemd to share his feelings. He, too, was looking with reverent eyes toward the bed, and as he caught Stanton's gaze, he whispered words which the Secretary of War did not condemn—

"The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places."

The night hours crawled on with an intolerable slowness. Some of the watchers sat, but Stanton remained rigid at the bed-foot. He had not been well of late and had been ordered a long rest by his doctor, but he was not conscious of fatigue.

He would not have left his post for a king's ransom, for he felt himself communing with the dying, sharing the last stage in his journey as he had shared all the rough marches. His proud spirit found a certain solace in the abasement of its humbleness.

A little before six the morning light began to pale the lamps. The window showed a square of gray, cloudy sky, and outside on the porch there was a drip of rain. The faces revealed by the cold dawn were as haggard and yellow as that of the dying man. Wafts of the outer air began to freshen the stuffiness of the little room.

The city was waking up. There came the sound of far-away carts and horses, and a boy in the lane behind the house began to whistle and then to sing. "When I Was Young," he sang—

"When I was young, I used to wait
At Massa's table, 'n' hand de plate,
An' pass de bottle when he was dry,
An' brush away de blue-tailed fly."

"It is his song," Stanton said to himself, and with the air came a rush of strange feelings. He remembered a thousand things, which before had been only a background of which he had been scarcely conscious. The constant kindliness, the gentle, healing sympathy, the homely humor which he once thought had irritated but which he now knew had soothed him.

This man had been twined round the roots of every heart. All night he had been in an ecstasy of admiration, but now that was forgotten in a yearning love. The President had been part of his being, closer to him than wife or child.

"But I can't forget,"

the boy sang,

"until I die
Ole Massa an' de blue-tailed fly."

Stanton's eyes filled with hot tears. He had not wept since his daughter died.

The breathing from the bed was growing faint. Suddenly the surgeon-general held up his hand. He felt the heart and shook his head.

"Fetch your mother," he said to Robert Lincoln.

The minister had dropped on his knees by the bedside and was praying.

"The President is dead," said the surgeon-general, and at the words it seemed that every head in the room was bowed on the breast.

Stanton took a step forward with a strange, appealing motion of the arms. It was noted by more than one that his pale face was transfigured.

"Yesterday he was America's," he cried. "Our very own. Now he is all the world's. Now he belongs to the ages."

EPILOGUE

MR. FRANCIS HAMILTON, an honorary attaché of the British Embassy, stood on the steps of the Capitol watching the procession which bore the President's body from the White House to lie in state in the great rotunda. He was a young man of some thirty Summers, who after a distinguished Oxford career was preparing himself with a certain solemnity for the House of Commons.

He sought to be an authority on foreign affairs, and with this aim was making a tour among the legations. Two years befor he had come to Washington, intending to remain for six months, and somewhat to his own surprize had stayed on, declining to follow his kinsman Lord Lyons to Constantinople. Himself a stanch follower of Mr. Disraeli and an abhorrer of Whiggery in all its forms, he yet found in America's struggle that which appealed both to his brain and his heart.

He was a believer, he told himself, in the Great State, and an opponent of parochialism, so, unlike most of his friends at home, his sympathies were engaged for the Union. Moreover he seemed to detect in the protagonists a Roman simplicity pleasing to a good class.

Mr. Hamilton was somberly but fashionably dressed and wore a gold eyeglass on a black ribbon, because he fancied that a monocle adroitly used was a formidable weapon in debate. He had neat small side-whiskers and a pleasant observant eye.

With him was young Major Endicott from Boston and the eminent Mr. James Russell Lowell who, as Longfellow's successor in the Smith Professorship and one of the editors of the *North American Review*, was a great figure in cultivated circles. Both were acquaintances made by Mr. Hamilton on a recent visit to Harvard. He found it agreeable to have a few friends with whom he could have scholarly talk.

The three watched the procession winding through the mourning streets. Every house was draped in funeral black; the bell tolled from every church and the minute-guns boomed at the City Hall and on Capitol Hill.

Mr. Hamilton watched the cortege at first with a critical eye. The events of the past week had wrought in him a great expectation, which he feared would be disappointed. It needed a long tradition to do fitting honor to the man who had gone. Had America such a tradition, he asked himself?

The colored troops marching at the head of the line pleased him. That was a happy thought. He liked, too, the business-like cavalry and infantry and the battered fieldpieces. He saw his chief among the foreign ministers, bearing a face of portentous solemnity. But he liked best the Illinois and Kentucky delegates; he thought the dead President would have liked them too.

Major Endicott was pointing out the chief figures.

"There's Grant—and Stanton, looking more cantankerous than ever. They say he's broken-hearted."

But Mr. Hamilton had no eye for celebrities. He was thinking rather of those plain mourners from the West and of the poorest house in Washington decked with black.

"This is a true national sorrow," he thought.

He had been brought up as a boy from Eton to see Wellington's funeral, and the sight had not impressed him like this. For the recent months had wakened odd emotions in his orderly and somewhat cynical soul. He had discovered a hero.

The three bared their heads as a long line filed by. Mr. Lowell said nothing. Now and then he pulled at his long mustaches, as if to hide some emotion which clamored for expression. The mourners passed into the Capitol while the bells still tolled and the guns boomed. The cavalry-escort formed up on guard; from below came the sound of sharp military commands.

Mr. Hamilton was shaken out of the admirable detachment which he had cultivated. He wanted to sit down and sob like a child. Some brightness had died in the air, some great thing had gone forever from the world and left it empty. He found himself regarding with a sudden disfavor the brilliant career which he had planned for himself.

It was only second-rate after all, that glittering old world of courts and legislatures and embassies. For a moment he had had a glimpse of the first-rate, and it had shivered his pretty palaces. He wanted now something which he did not think he would find again.

The three turned to leave, and at last Mr. Lowell spoke.

"There goes," he said, "the first American."

Mr. Hamilton heard the words as he was brushing delicately with his sleeve a slight beruffflement of his silk hat.

"I dare say you are right, professor," he said. "But I think it is also the last of the kings."

THE END

THE ADVENTURER

by Mary Stewart Cutting

"To die is different from what we supposed, and luckier."
—*Walt Whitman.*

GOD-SPEED, and naught to stay me!
The word has come today
That Life shall not delay me
From faring on my way.

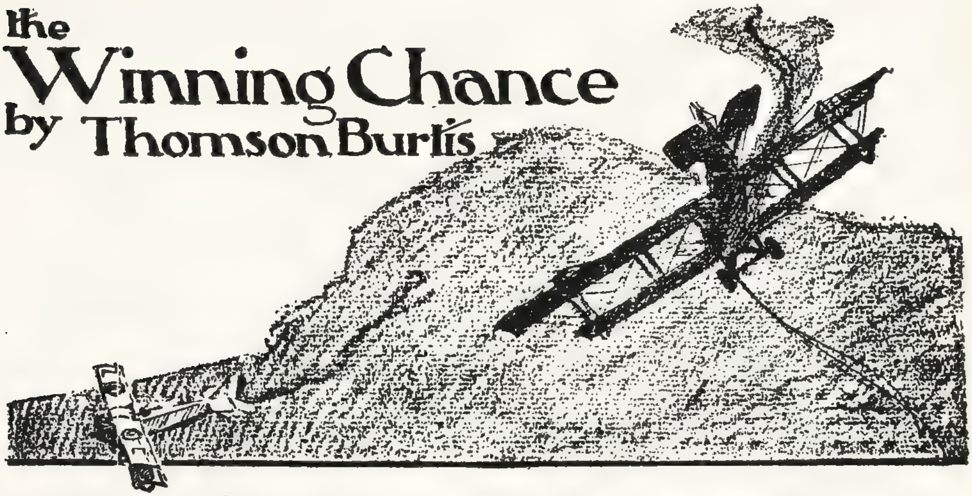
I may not wait for blessing;
I may not halt for fear,
Nor any last caressing,
For I must straight from here,

Though where I go I know not,
Nor any knew who passed;
But none may say, "I go not!"
When that Word comes at last.

Why does it set me thrilling?
So glad, so glad am I,
Who thought men cower'd, unwilling,
When they were called to die!

the Winning Chance

by Thomson Burtis



Author of "Dumpy Puts One Over," "Mission Successfully Completed," etc.

A LARGE number of men who should know consider the flying officers of the Army Air Service border-patrol, which extends from the Gulf of Mexico to southern California, the best group of all-round airmen in the world. And of them all, "Dumpy" Scarth of Marfa was conceded to be, if not the best, at least unsurpassed. Then came one Lee MacDowell to join the gang along the Rio Grande, bringing with him several elements calculated to make Dumpy redouble his efforts to keep his crown firmly resting in its wonted place. And thereby hangs our tale.

The day "Tex" MacDowell reported for duty the dozen flying officers who composed the McMullen flight of the border-patrol were lounging lazily on the steps of the recreation building, taking advantage of the little patch of shade cast by the roof. Out on the field Dumpy Scarth was warming up his ship, preparatory to taking off on his return trip to Marfa.

"When Dumpy lit in here this morning I was tickled to death," stated big blond George Hickman, "but I'll be hanged if I was ever so glad to speed the parting guest in my life!"

"I wanted to hear the straight of that stunt of his, too," said Beaman. "That bird is sure a flyer, and I guess he pulled off one of the best little pieces of airwork we'll ever hear about, but good ——! That line of conversation he puts out just naturally would spoil anything!"

Short, stocky Captain Kennard, C. O. of the flight, laughed at Beaman's disgusted tone.

"Dumpy is a wonder in more ways than one," he opined, lighting a cigaret and leaning back comfortably against the railing.

He raised his voice slightly as the warming motor on the line increased its roar.

"He's the first fat-headed hot-air artist I ever saw who could really make good. And who would pick a rolypoly little —— like him for one of the best flyers in the Army—a real genius at it?"

"He's really good then, is he?" inquired Cravath, a new man who had arrived the day before from a Northern field.

"He sure is," replied Hickman, who was an observer. "He's a grand-stander and all that, but no matter how much he toots his own horn on flying, he can back it up. His last stunt, though, has supplied too much pleasure for that pint-size brain of his. —— knows his head was swelled enough before, but now that he's famous he's reached the limit."

The subject of these remarks had recently become the most talked about man in the Air Service. A crook, who had been bob-tailed from the flying-corps, had stolen a De Haviland airplane from Donovan Field, having a double purpose in mind: to get even with the commanding officer who had been the means of his expulsion, and to secure twelve thousand dollars in cash by delivering the ship to a young Mexican who was an aeronautical enthusiast. Dumpy

Scarth, by a really marvelous bit of nervy, accurate flying, had succeeded in dragging a weighted wire through the propeller of the stolen ship, forcing it to land on the Marfa airdrome.

"Well, I guess he's about ready to take off," said the captain as the noise of the motor died down and the mechanics pulled the blocks from the wheels.

"I wonder what exhibition he'll pull off to prove that we haven't got a flyer to compare with him."

"I believe we have," returned Hickman. "The only trouble with you pilots is that you've got too much sense to slap the gods in their faces by doing all this crazy stuff to show off."

"Maybe this new man coming in this afternoon will be crazy enough to uphold the honor of McMullen. Hello! Here comes Dumpy!"

The De Haviland came roaring across the field, two feet above the ground. It was headed for the big baseball backstop on the edge of the airdrome, about fifty feet from the squadron building and directly in front of it. As the great ship, still less than fifteen feet high, flashed even and to the left of the wire structure, it banked up until almost vertical. With a deafening rush it swept past the astonished group on the steps, around the backstop, and then upward in a beautiful climbing turn. Dumpy's lower wing had not been five feet off the ground, and he had cleared the squadron building by less than twenty feet —the backstop about the same. Straightening out, he waved a fat arm to the men below and drove swiftly westward toward Marfa.

Cravath had watched these happenings with his mouth literally hanging open.

"What's the matter—don't they do that stuff where you come from?" chuckled the C. O.

"Why—why—the —— fool!" sputtered Cravath. "If that ship had slipped, or mushed a little more, why——"

"Sure. But when Dumpy has the stick they never do. And that's the reason he gets away with all this bragging. Take his conceit about flying out of him and he'd be a good scout. But when a man flies like that, what can you do?"

"The answer is—nothing!" stated Cravath. "And I'll say this new man will be a curly wolf if he matches Scarth!"

"That reminds me—get a car started to meet him on the 3:10, will you, George?"

"Already gone, captain," replied Hickman, who was transportation officer in his spare time.

"Who is our new addition," asked Jimmy Jennings, who was just out of the hospital where he had spent three months as the result of a bad wreck.

"He's a young Texan who flew with the Royal Air Force from 1915 on," answered the captain. "He took the examinations in July for the American Air Service and landed a first lieutenancy. He was a captain with the British. Has three Huns to his credit—official—and was a prisoner in Germany for several months."

"If he trained with those Englishmen he's liable to be a wild *hombre*," remarked Binder, who had been overseas. "They were the wildest bunch in the world. They actually trained their flyers that way; not a one of them thought any more of their necks than they did of a nickel!"

Captain Kennard, who had the D.S.C. for bringing down a couple of boche himself, grinned reminiscently.

"There was a Bristol Squadron stationed at Cologne after the armistice, and they flew down to Coblenz, where we were, on a social visit. I had to fly a Salmson back that way so I joined the formation of little Bristols on their way back. That English flight commander led his formation straight for the Rhine, and by the great horn-spoon he never got ten feet above the water all the way to Cologne. It was awful! Of course I couldn't leave the formation and admit myself beaten, but when we were scooting up that river between those high banks I'll admit I was scared stiff. You remember that first Coblenz bridge?"

Binder nodded.

"That whole formation went under the thing and never broke!"

"You weren't at Cologne when the Prince of Wales made his visit, were you?" Binder asked the captain. "I never saw anything like it in my life. Those crazy fools took off in Sopwiths, and three of them looped off the ground! Then the whole bunch lined up in the air, and one after another sideslipped down. Without any exaggeration most of them bounced their wheels off the side of a hangar. They got into a loose formation and looped, spun and rolled—in formation, mind you! I believe the French might have been better flyers, but those johnnies had all records for wildness."

"They had a training-field over here at Fort Worth during the war," put in little Pete Miller. "They killed a lot of men. I'll say you had to be a flyer or quit in that bunch. They'd give a man a couple of hours' instruction and start him looping. They figured wild stuff made war-time flyers—not a one of them had any more idea of playing safe than they did of going up without a prop."

OVER at the edge of the airdrome a khaki-colored car appeared, returning from town. It drew up in front of the veranda and a tall, sunburnt, wide-shouldered young officer climbed out, coming to salute.

"Is the commanding officer here, suh?" he inquired, addressing the captain.

"Right here," returned the captain, stretching out his hand. "You're MacDowell, I suppose."

"Yes, suh."

"Glad to see you. Meet the gang."

During the introductions everybody scrutinized the latest addition to their circle with interest. He was at least six-feet-two as he stood. His tanned, clean-cut face was made notable by his eyes. Large and wide-set they were, dark gray in color, and they met the glances of the flyers with keen appraisal. When his slow smile illuminated MacDowell's face you always seemed to see a little devil of recklessness dancing in his eyes. When that happened any one who caught it instantly decided that Lieutenant Lee MacDowell had a considerable portion of his satanic Majesty hidden within him.

"Can I cache my truck somewhere?" he asked after presentations were over. He spoke with a barely perceptible drawl, and his words had a trace of the musical slur that is the mark of the Southland.

"You'll have tent seven. I'll get a man to carry your stuff down."

In a moment MacDowell disappeared in the wake of his luggage.

"What were all those ribbons he had?" asked Jennings. "I didn't get a good look."

"Croix de Guerre with three palms, Legion of Honor and the British Distinguished Service Order," answered Binder.

"Looks to be a good scout," said Jimmy.

"Seems to me I've seen him before," remarked the captain, rubbing his jaw thoughtfully. "I'll be —— if I can remember where, though."

"Probably ran into him overseas somewhere," suggested Carson, lifting himself slowly to his feet. "Well, I'm due for a nap, a wash and a shave before dinner."

They dispersed to their tents, gathering again two hours later in the mess-hall. MacDowell, quietly self-possessed, said but little during the meal until Captain Kennard, who had been watching him covertly, asked—

"Were you ever around Nancy much, MacDowell?"

"Considerable," admitted the Texan with his slow smile, the fine network of wrinkles deepening around his eyes. "Some town, Nancy!"

The captain grinned in sympathy with the twinkle in MacDowell's dancing eyes.

"Right. I guess that's where I've seen you. Your face is familiar. Probably at the Liegiouse Café. Your gang used to be there a lot."

"I've heard a lot about that café. Wasn't that the place that was almost given up to flyers, and where they used to go through some sort of a ceremony every night?" asked Binder.

"That's the place. Did I ever tell you about it?" The C. O. looked around the table, but most of the flyers shook their heads. Some, like Jennings and Binder, had been there, but there were only four overseas officers in the outfit. The captain gazed out the window, over the fast-darkening flying-field, where the lights on hangar-corners were winking out, surrounding the airdrome with points of light. He seemed to be reliving those teeming war days once more.

"Every Allied flyer who was stationed near Nancy would gather if possible at the Liegiouse Café for dinner in the evening. Until the place was filled nobody ate, but just sat around drinking, kidding the French girls and each other. Then, at about seven o'clock the highest ranking officer there—and more often than not it was a certain French general who came whenever he could—knocked on the table and dead silence settled over the brilliant restaurant. One by one every flying-squadron represented would report how many of their men had been killed or reported missing that day. And always the Royal Air Force led in the number of flyers gone. After the reports were in, the general or whoever was doing the thing would rise and call on everybody to fill their glasses. Then every one rose and with his glass held high the general gave the toast—always the same:

> " 'The little sands of the hour-glass
> Measure time as it flies;
> Here's to the men gone West today
> And here's to the next man who dies!'

"Silently the toast was drunk, every man wondering whether that toast would prove to be for him next day. Then the dinners came on, the sound of talk and laughter filled the café, and the little moment of solemnity was gone."

Something in the captain's quiet, vivid words impressed the young officers, and for a moment no one spoke. Then MacDowell broke the silence as he drawled whimsically,

"The Royal Air Force swelled their total a lot reporting me gone. I had forced landings on the way back from patrol so often it seemed like I never could get back in time to escape being bumped off in the Liegiouse!"

Through the rest of the meal and in the comfortable lounging-room afterward Captain Kennard and the Texan swapped yarns of the old days overseas. The personality of MacDowell grew on his listeners. His dryly humorous speech, and the noticeable fact that in none of his stories did he mention himself, rapidly secured for him the liking of every one of his comrades-to-be. As Jimmy Jennings remarked, *sotto voce*, to Mills:

"He's kept us listening for over an hour and never yet told us how he got his first seventy planes or how those decorations came to bloom on his blouse. Some change after Dumpy, eh?"

Before long the conversation changed to the ubiquitous Mr. Robert Scarth and MacDowell heard all about him. He had heard of Dumpy's achievement in a general way, and was much interested in the details.

"The boy was sure flying," he said, as he expertly rolled a cigaret. "Too bad he's as good a barracks flyer as he is a real one, though."

"It's funny—flying is the only thing he's conceited about," put in Mallory, who was dummy hand in a bridge game over in the corner. "And he's really a pretty good scout—good-natured, give you the shirt off his back if you needed it and all that, but when it comes to flying——"

"He's suffering with a mental freeze and a verbal thaw, eh?" suggested Tex.

"He was kidding us today, asking why we didn't pull off something down here to put McMullen on the map. He thinks because he's crazy that anybody who won't gamble his life against his motor seventy times a day is no good!"

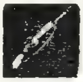
MacDowell yawned, rose and stretched his long length sleepily.

"Guess I'll be turning in—didn't get much sleep in that two-by-four berth last night. Will it be possible for me to get a flight tomorrow, captain?"

"Sure thing. You've flown De Havilands, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir. I had a few flights at Donovan Field before I came down. Of course I'm not so experienced that I'll be rivaling Dumpy Scarth for a while——"

And with his slow grin he lounged out, leaving his fellows to speculate somewhat on the precise significance of that statement.



NEXT morning the ship in which MacDowell was flying was casually banking and wingturning over the airdrome as the pilot felt it out. Below, the other members of the flight were keeping an eye on it. Somehow or other they had a feeling that the new man "had the goods." That is just what one was likely to think of MacDowell. He gave an impression of all-round capability. Mills and Beaman were off on the eastward patrol to the Gulf of Mexico, and Binder with his observer, Wallace, had the westward course. The rest of the airmen were watching, ready to pass judgment.

After a while the drone of the motor overhead gradually decreased until it could not be heard. The De Haviland, silhouetted against the flawless blue of the sky, looked as if it were absolutely motionless. It was, so far as forward speed went. It gradually grew in size, however, and to the men on the ground it was apparent that MacDowell was "stalling" down. Stalling is a peculiarly skilful bit of flying. The ship, being without flying-speed, drops, and it requires the finest imaginable sense of balance to keep it level, preventing it from going into a nose dive or dropping off into a spin. It is done by cutting the motor, pulling the nose up, and then working to keep level by infinitely delicate use of the controls, which are only slightly effective, due to lack of speed.

For probably a thousand feet the ship settled, and then went into a dive. The motor roared suddenly and was still again as the pilot jazzed it to burn out surplus oil. In a moment it pulled up again, hovering like a soaring bird. Several times more this happened, until the ship was only about four hundred feet high, a little to one side of the airdrome.

"He'd better quit monkeying around now. If she drops off on him he never could pull out before he hit the ground," remarked Jennings, resting in his crutch. "—— pretty flying, though."

Even as he spoke the ship went into a steep spiral that brought it around over the fence on the northern edge of the airdrome, about fifty feet high, and headed directly into the southeast wind blowing from the Gulf of Mexico. Instead of continuing the dive, however, the nose came up once more. The spectators gasped involuntarily as the D. H. hovered a moment and then began to settle, still hanging level and almost motionless in the air except for its downward speed.

Twenty feet above the ground the motor roared suddenly. It could not generate forward speed immediately, but just above the ground it gave the ship speed enough to allow MacDowell to get the tail down for a perfect three-point landing. It alighted hard, with little forward speed; the ship did not roll a hundred feet.

Jennings, a wonderful flyer himself, gazed at the captain speechlessly.

The little C. O. met Jimmy Jennings' eyes for a moment and then nodded slowly.

"Apparently," he stated thoughtfully, "this boy can fly, which I figured, and likewise cares little or nothing for his neck, of which I had a slight suspicion."

To the laymen a stall landing would seem without particular interest, and entirely devoid of thrills. But to the expert flyers it showed supreme flying-skill. Any flaw in the handling of the ship in that last stall would have meant death, for it takes five hundred feet altitude to pull a De Haviland out of a dive from a stall, or a tailspin. The slightest miscue, and the ship would have fallen off in one of those two deadly positions. It showed consummate judgment of flying-speed, and the confidence of a man who is a real flyer, and knows it. Likewise, it indicated a large amount of Simon-pure daredeviltry. Handling a plane in a complete stall landing can never be taught—it means long experience plus flying-genius.

That was what MacDowell possessed—flying-genius. He seemed in his natural element in the air and was consumed with an insatiable hunger to fly. And from the day he was voted a master flyer by the expert judges of the McMullen flight it seemed as if "Tex," as they began to call him, was fated to draw the spotlight. Without particular effort on his part he became the subject of considerable conversation up and down the border, and over at Marfa poor Dumpy Scarth shortly began to feel himself slipping from his high estate.

"And don't ever think he's a grandstander," George Hickman told the C. O. one night.

George, Jennings' former observer had been assigned as MacDowell's aerial teammate while Jimmy was convalescing.

"That boy is a lulu—a leaping, larruping son-of-a-gun in the air. The stuff he does around the field here isn't a patch to what he pulls off when he's enjoying himself away from home. You know that San Elizabeth Road? Well, the other day he got down about ten feet over that road, flying the turns. When we came to that long straight stretch he actually put his wheels on the road and with his tail in the air skimmed along it, most of the time holding his wheels to the road! There was a big automobile came around the bend about half a mile ahead of us and it got scared and backed into the ditch. When we zoomed over it there was an old fat codger out there shaking his fist. You could see the purple on his face from the air!"

Captain Kennard joined in Hickman's mirth, but immediately thereafter treated Tex to a fatherly talk. He did not know the half of it then, however, for the occupant of the automobile had been no less a character than Dave Fitzpatrick, who wielded much influence up and down the border, mostly through the Big Bend district.

Mr. Fitzpatrick was universally despised by the better element, for he was known to be a go-between for smugglers, both of whisky from Mexico and of firearms from the United States. He ostensibly conducted a general store on the Mexican side of the river. Consequently his blistering charges, made to the colonel commanding the district, had less weight than from another man.

In fact, after he had left, the colonel laughed till the tears rolled down his face at Fitzpatrick's profane description of the ten miles he had walked to get a team to pull his car out of the ditch, and various other highly spiced details. Then the colonel sent for Captain Kennard, who passed on to Tex the severe reprimand he received. And from Nogales to Corpus Christi civilians and Army men chuckled in unholy glee—even Dumpy, who was much disgruntled to think that he hadn't done the thing himself.

Dumpy didn't begrudge another man his success—notoriety being Dumpy's ideal of success—but rather he always cursed himself for not having thought of doing that particular thing himself. As he read the papers after MacDowell's little adventure in road-flying he felt himself slipping out of the limelight. His premonition was well founded, for only a week later MacDowell became an extensively advertised young man.

Before that happened Tex had carved for himself a deep niche in the respect and affection of McMullen. His whimsical humor, all-round capability and entire absence of egotism caused him to make good with his flight from the start. They admired him for his ability and liked him for himself. He was a never failing source of entertainment, as well. There was the incident of his first tour as officer of the day, for instance.

One of the duties of the O. D. was to take charge of reveille in the morning and give the enlisted men of the flight a half-hour of drill before breakfast. Tex came in to breakfast with a wide grin on his face.

"Anybody got a drill manual?" he inquired as he seated himself. "I'll sure need it next time I go on."

"What's the matter?" asked the captain.

Tex grinned wider than ever.

"Well, you see I never have had any handling of men and what I don't know about drill would fill a library. I got to hiking those boys around this morning, getting along pretty good, I figured. Then I got busy tryin' to keep the rear of the column in step and forgot the front. They were heading for that shed where the crates are, and marched right into it. I didn't know what command to give to get 'em out, so I sings out, 'Out o' that shed; march!' "

A gale of laughter interrupted him. With twinkling eyes but solemn face Tex went on with his tale, drawling a little more than usual.

"After that I figured I'd better run 'em around a minute or two, for exercise, you know. So I gives 'em double time and we start running. After we had loped around a while I was getting tired and then found out I didn't remember what the command was to stop 'em. I knew it wasn't just 'Halt' so I kept on running 'em, trying to think of it. I ran until my tongue was hanging out and my ears flapping with fatigue. Poor old Sergeant Sims out there was wheezing like a donkey-engine, and I pretty near cried every time he gives me a look of appeal. The rest o' the boys was commencing to drag the ground, too, and the lay was getting serious as ——. I felt apoplexy coming on, myself. Finally I gets 'em headed for the mess-halls. Thank —— the doors were open. I headed 'em for the steps, stumbling and falling along, and then I just fades away around the corner. I guess they got to breakfast!"

THE manner in which Lee MacDowell became known literally the country over was simply another illustration of the way the spotlight of more or less general interest seemed to follow him. He was aided and abetted by George Hickman in elevating a fairly common flying-feat into the realms of the unusual. Hickman was one of the McLaughlin-Locklear clan of flyers who casually climb over and around a ship in flight when ordinary riding becomes too monotonous to satisfy their craving for excitement.

MacDowell and Hickman were sent to Donovan Field with an old De Haviland, which they were to leave there for overhaul and repair, flying a new one back to McMullen. Hickman's ability as an aerial acrobat being well known, Major Schaffer, who was in charge of the drive for new Air Service recruits, arranged that the representative of a moving-picture news weekly take some pictures of Hickman in action for purposes of Air Service publicity. The movie man was glad of an opportunity to get the pictures for his company's weekly.

Consequently George climbed around the big De Haviland to the great delight of several hundred civilians and several thousand Army men gathered at Donovan Field. It was the new ship and immediately after the exhibition Tex and Hickman were to wing their way on to McMullen.

Came the final punch of the film. According to previous arrangement the observer inched his way back to the horizontal stabilizer in the rear, and sat there calmly, hanging to the vertical fin, while the pilot put the ship in a steep sideslip. He slipped down directly in front of the camera, Hickman in plain view. Fifty feet from the ground, and about as far in front of the camera man, Tex slowly kicked his plane out of the slip. As the D. H. came level the wheels tipped the ground lightly.

Then a groan of dismay came from the onlookers, stretched for a quarter of a mile along the edge of the great flying-field, for one wheel had crumpled up. So quickly had it happened, and so light the touch of the ship to the ground, that it was back in the air again, the defective wheel hanging uselessly from the landing-gear. The horrified spectators could see Hickman crawling back to the rear cockpit as the ship pointed southwest and headed for McMullen. It was evident that neither pilot nor passenger knew what had happened.

Ignorant of their peril, they would land at the normal rate—seventy miles an hour. And when the two-ton ship, with one wheel off, touched the ground—even the switches would still be on and fire was almost a certainty. Every flyer there knew that the gas-tank would probably burst in the wreck, and the gas-drenched men would be human fire-torches, if the wreck itself did not kill them.

Major Schaffer, his tanned face gone white, leaped into a motorcycle sidecar and the driver sent it hurtling toward the telegraph office. Almost behind him came the camera man, who, although far from a hard-hearted person, had a strictly mercenary purpose in view. Twenty minutes later, down in McMullen, Captain Kennard was reading the major's telegram:

> MacDowell and Hickman on way to McMullen with broken left wheel. They do not know it. For —— sake try to let them know before they land.
> SCHAFFER.

And even as the captain reached for the telephone a photographer in McMullen who frequently took pictures for the news weekly was starting to rush his equipment together to be in at the death.

Captain Kennard was talking to the garage.

"And the only chance we have to stop them from landing and get a chance to signal them is to block the field. Get every truck, ambulance, motorcycle and other transportation strung out across the field!"

The same orders went to the hangars. In ten minutes every officer and man at McMullen was working like mad in the blazing afternoon sun. The two-hundred-and-fifty-mile trip from Donovan Field would take two hours or more, but there was no time to lose. Trucks that would not run were pushed by eager hands—even crates and boxes were added to the impromptu rampart that stretched across the airdrome. When all was done the grimy toilers, sweat-streams grooving their dust-covered faces, sat down to wait for the ship and its blissfully ignorant passengers. Captain Kennard roved around, seeing to it that fire-extinguishers were ready, signal-flags prepared, and one ambulance ready to go. Major Searles, the flight surgeon, arranged and rearranged his bandages and instruments with suspicious moisture in his kind old eyes. The major had never become accustomed to the ups and downs of the flying-game.

By the time the ship came in sight, a mere speck far to the north, the sides of the field were packed with civilians who had heard the news. The photographer was in readiness. Almost unbearable nervousness seemed to seize the crowd as the ship drew near, and Army men leaped for their proper posts.

At two thousand feet over the airdrome the motor's roar died down and the plane circled downward in a spiral. Could it be possible that the flyers did not see the obstructions across the field? A deep sigh of relief came from the crowd below as the motor went full on again and the ship circled the field at five hundred feet. Two heads could be seen craning over the sides of the cockpits. Three enlisted men started throwing wheels in the air and a sergeant with his white signal-flags signaled slowly, "Your left wheel gone—your left wheel gone," over and over.

With a thousand eyes glued to the ship, Hickman's big form could be seen climbing out of the rear cockpit, edging slowly along the side of the ship toward a wing. Once on it he hung to a strut, leaned over the side and looked at the landing-gear, the De Haviland still circling the field. Then he straightened up, crawled toward the pilot, and leaned close to him, apparently telling him his findings.

This done, he climbed back in his seat, out the other side, and while the spectators held their collective breath he crawled out to the extreme tip of the right wing, on which side the good wheel was.

Then the crowd below sprang into action. With willing civilians helping them, the soldiers quickly cleared a two-hundred-foot path through the impromptu fence across the field. The ship went north again for a mile, turned loggily, and as it headed for the field started a gradual dive. As it neared the boundary fence Hickman could be seen, clinging to the right wing-tip. A hundred feet high, and the motor stopped dead—the switches were cut. Only the force of the air-stream turned the propeller lazily. The dive steepened—speed was essential. A hundred miles an hour or more the ship skimmed the fence, and as it straightened above the ground the right wing-tip began to settle slowly. Cocked up as it was, it touched the ground lightly on the good wheel, Hickman's weight keeping the left end of the axle from dragging the ground. A mighty cheer of relief and admiration arose from the onlookers as the ship was stopped by twenty men from hitting the backstop through its excessive speed. Hickman's nerve plus MacDowell's perfect handling of the ship——

"Some combination!" yelled the captain, smiting the mayor of McMullen on a broad back that almost bent beneath the blow. The mayor, being engaged in waving his immense black sombrero, had breath only for a briefly profane word of agreement.

WHEN word of the event reached Marfa in its progress along the border Dumpy Scarth filled the air with oratorical questions as to why there was so much fuss made over the landing.

"Why, seventy-five per cent. of the Air Service pilots could have done it!" he declaimed, and usually launched into a description of some forced landing of his own that he considered much more skilful.

As a matter of cold fact, he was right. It had required A-1 flying-ability to make the landing, but the border-patrol flyers were all grade A flyers.

Nevertheless, it was too good an opportunity for kidding purposes to let go by. The incident had been made to order for movie purposes, and as newspaper articles, civilian comment, and finally the movies themselves came along with MacDowell and Hickman featured, Dumpy became wilder and wilder. The deliberate effort of his comrades to egg him on was a constant stimulus.

Matters came to a head when Dumpy landed at McMullen, ostensibly to borrow some spark-plugs, pending the arrival of a supply shipment from Donovan Field to the Marfa flight. His real reason for the long trip—the plugs could have been obtained from Donovan Field itself in less flying-time—was to try to belittle MacDowell's achievement right on his home sod. He wanted to state personally that he did not consider Tex any flying wonder at all.

"The trouble with you, Dumpy," stated Binder with a wink at the others, "is that you think grand-stand stuff is the most skilful part of flying. As a matter of fact, it don't show a —— thing!"

"Grand stand nothing!" yelled Dumpy, almost beside himself with rage. "I'll bet that I can beat this bird at any kind of flying. All this cheap publicity on a common, ordinary landing like he made, with Hickman mostly responsible, makes me sick!"

"There's the window," murmured Beaman, who was enjoying the spasms of the fiery little flyer immensely.

"This MacDowell, now," pursued Binder, "is what I call a real flyer—the best on the border!"

Dumpy, his fat face red with wrath, registered complete disgust.

"Best on the border! If he is, I'm the best cotton-picker in seven States!"

"Well, now that Mac has come along you'd better take up cotton-picking or something if you want to stand first in anything," grinned Jennings.

"Huh! I'd just like to have a chance to show this bird up!"

The McMullenites, led by Binder, jumped at the opening.

"In real flying—like landing for a mark or something—you wouldn't have a chance!"

Before he left Dumpy had issued a sweeping challenge to Tex for a contest in landing for the mark, stunting, or any other branch of flying. Tex was off on patrol, but when he got back he demurred strongly.

However, it was put up to him as a patriotic duty for the honor of McMullen, the good of the Air Service, and the future comfort of the border-patrol, to whom Dumpy's flying monologs had become very, very, old.

"But I may not beat him!" Tex told them. "According to accounts, he's good!"

This was the least of McMullen's troubles, however. Their confidence was sublime. After Captain Kennard had made a visit to Donovan Field and taken various high-ranking officers into his confidence, the event was scheduled to take place at Donovan Field immediately after the quarterly inspection of the commanding general of the department, due in another week. And word-of-mouth advertising carried the news far and wide. Officially every one was in ignorance. Actually, there were thousands of dollars' worth of bets placed. Nearly everybody hoped that Tex would win, and likewise everybody but the McMullen flight believed that he didn't stand a chance.

Came the inspection day. From all over the border every one who could get away was there. There was always a big flying exhibition staged at the inspection, so hundreds of civilian cars were parked along the field. Word from their Army friends had come to the population of San Antonio about the landing competition as well, and every one was set to stay after the general had completed the official program of the afternoon.

The line along the mile of white hangars was solid with glistening ships. The pursuit group, with their little scouts, had one end; the bombardment group, De Havilands, the other. In front of the ships officers and men at attention stood like statues as the general and his staff went by. While he was inspecting, the mechanics' school from Field One sent a formation of four ships up and down the line. Then the pursuit group took the air, and the sky became dark with little single-seated S E 5's, which dived and zoomed, looped and rolled in continuous acrobatics for ten minutes.

Bombardment took the air when the pursuit group finished, and with the roar of thirty mighty Liberty motors literally making the ground vibrate, they flew, a tremendous bombing formation—a series of V's, each a little higher than the other. Just after they landed the big cars of the general's party left the field, and with a common impulse cars, enlisted men and officers converged toward the middle of the field, where a new whitewashed circle, five yards in diameter, stood out against the grayish grass-tufts. Inside the circle was another one, solidly whitewashed, a foot in diameter, marking the exact center.

Dumpy was in his glory as he walked up and down in front of his De Haviland. He knew that the throng of people were talking about him, retelling the story of how he had brought down the stolen ship. He ostentatiously inspected his ship as a mechanic warmed it up. Tex, cigaret in hand, lounged easily behind the crowd, talking to Captain Kennard and other McMullenites.

"Win, you lazy old son-of-a-gun!" the captain was telling him. "There won't be any more money for you to win at poker this month if you lose. I just put down a hundred with Schaffer myself!"

"We're tryin'," grinned MacDowell, rolling another cigaret. "But a man has sure got to be on the job in this landing-for-a-mark stuff!"

Which remark was all solid meat. To a non-flyer it probably would not seem such a sure indicator of ability, at first glance. As a matter of fact, landing for a mark shows flying skill as no other single thing. It requires perfect judgment, as well as handling of the ship. In the first place there is no way of killing the speed of a ship after it has touched the ground. It simply rolls until the wings, and the friction of wheels and tailskid, stops it. Consequently the flyer landing for a mark must judge just where to hit the ground so that his plane will roll to the mark, providing he lands at a certain speed.

Seventy miles an hour is normal landing-speed for a De Haviland. After he figures that, he must so handle his ship in the air that it will hit that precise spot on the ground at just that speed. The conditions of the contest were that the motor should be cut off completely, the landing to be made with a dead stick, propeller not moving; engine absolutely dead. The motor was to be cut at a thousand feet. Consequently if a man undershot his mark there would be no way to get additional speed.

If, as his plane skimmed along just above the ground, he figures he has a little too much speed, he can skid sidewise with his rudder, killing a little of his speed. The whole maneuver is a test of flying-sense, accurate judgment of speed and distance, with perfect handling of the ship taken for granted, as riding is fundamental in polo. Consummate skill in actual flying is only the first requirement in landing for a mark.

AN EXPECTANT murmur rose from the massed onlookers as Dumpy, his helmet just in sight above the front cockpit, took the air. By tossing a coin he had drawn first try. As always, he had to grand-stand a little. He banked with his wingskid almost scraping the ground, pointed the ship for the crowd, and then as women shrieked and men stumbled and fell trying to get out of the way, he zoomed. Steadily he climbed until he was a thousand feet over the white circle, pointed into the wind, which was west, the way the landings would be made. Then the roar of the motor died and the propeller could be seen, turning lazily.

Now that the test had arrived, Dumpy took no chances, but went about his task in a workman-like manner. No grand-standing now. He turned his ship to the right, and then in a wide left-hand spiral came down slowly. At a hundred feet he was an equal number of yards away from the mark, to the east of it. His ship began to sideslip, turning toward the mark as it came down. Ten feet from the ground it came out of the slip, headed directly for the mark. Then the tail went sideward, and it skidded for a moment, straightening just as it hit the ground in a perfect landing. As it rolled toward the mark the propeller was motionless. Slower and slower the great plane came and an excited murmer came from the packed spectators as they saw how close he was going to come. With his round face poked over the side, Dumpy used rudder and ailerons to keep himself going straight for the whitewashed circle. Barely moving, the wheels rolled over the rim of the outside circle and stopped just within it. Dumpy had missed the exact center by less than ten feet.

Automobile horns honked, men cheered, and women joined shrill voices to the din. They had hoped Dumpy would lose—but what a flyer he was! And with all his conceit he was a good scout—the little fat rascal!

Tex, a whimsical grin on his face, shook his head sadly as he walked over to the ship in the circle. The crowd laughed in sympathy with him. No man alive could beat that landing except by sheer luck. Judgment could go no farther.

Dumpy, his face alight with triumph, leaped from the plane and mechanics shoved it through an opening in the crowd, back to the line.

"Some trouble beating that, eh Tex?" he shouted before his rolypoly form disappeared in a wave of admirers, led by the Marfa men.

Somehow or other, as Tex lounged easily over to his already roaring plane, the crowd had a feeling that all was not yet over. MacDowell gave that impression and there was his reputation behind him to back it up. As Captain Kennard retorted to Major Schaffer, who was already claiming his hundred—

"If it was anybody but Mac I'd kiss the hundred good-by, but let's wait a minute and see what happens."

Meanwhile Tex, that peculiar sparkle of recklessness very apparent in his eyes, joined Captain Kennard and the major.

"Captain, just what are the precise conditions of this little argument?" he inquired.

"Why, what do you mean?"

"I figured out a way I might win, if I'm lucky," drawled Tex. "Supposing I got nearest the mark, but sort of damaged the ship a little, maybe. I'd be taking kind of a chance, doing what I figure on."

Both men looked at the grinning flyer, sensing something that underlay his inquiry.

"My idea would be that it would depend on whether your damaging of the ship was due to poor flying or not," said Major Schaffer.

"Thanks," and Tex strolled over to his ship.

"Get me a spare cushion, and wire it firmly to the side of the cockpit—on the left," he ordered the mechanics.

"Now what the —— do you suppose that bird is up to?" Major Schaffer asked plaintively. "I don't see any earthly reason why it should be so, but —— if I don't feel that hundred slipping!"

Captain Kennard cackled gleefully.

"What did I tell you?" he crowed.

The buzzing crowd apparently had somewhat the same feeling as Major Schaffer, although they were as much puzzled as the mechanics, who, under MacDowell's supervision, had attached the cushion. Something unusual was about to happen.

Tex, flying without a helmet, took off across the field before the heartening cheers of the crowd had got well under way. He wasted no time, but got his thousand feet at once. Then, with the nose of the ship pointing into the wind, he cut the motor. Still the nose stayed up, and lazily the ship began to float downward in a stall. Three hundred feet, and then it swooped down, the singing of the wires plainly heard by the breathless, expectant mass of humanity below.

A half-turn, and the ship was pointed south, once again fluttering down in a beautiful level stall, still almost directly above the mark. Another three or four hundred feet, and it swooped again, gained flying-speed, and then up came the nose in another stall as the ship became almost motionless before it began to settle. This time it turned slowly. The flyers watching literally held their breaths. He was only a hundred feet high now, with no motor to give him a possible chance if his ship lost balance.

It dived again, curving around the mark, until at fifty feet it was directly over it, banked to the left. Tex was craning over the left side, in plain sight of the onlookers. Like a flash the nose came up again, and in a slow but almost vertical sideslip the ship dropped. Once it got too much speed, and with bottom rudder he checked it. While the crowd, as if turned to stone, watched helplessly they saw the lower wingtip drive itself directly through the little one-foot center circle. In a cloud of dust the great ship crumpled up in a crackling mass, as wing-struts and ribs broke.

Before the stunned crowd had recovered, Tex, grinning through the blood which smeared his face from a slight cut on the head, was out of the wreck and had a cigaret going.

"He deliberately sideslipped into the ground—and hit the mark plumb in the eye!" gasped Captain Kennard.

"Flying—plus guts!" said the major ruefully.

They shoved their way through the crowd toward the ship.

"Don't worry about me," they heard MacDowell's voice saying. "That's what I had the cushion for."

The wrecked ship completely covered the little spot that marked the exact center of the mark.

"Who wins, major?" yelled Captain Kendall of Marfa and a chorus echoed his inquiry.

The major looked at the ship, and then with a slow grin raised twinkling eyes to meet MacDowell's. He shook his head sadly, reached for his check-book, and amid a growing gale of hilarity made out a check and handed it to Captain Kennard.

"I bet on Scarth," he announced.

Dumpy, actuated by real sportsmanship plus the theatricalness that was a part of him, climbed to the top of the tilted fuselage.

"There aren't any pikers at Marfa," he shouted. "If my opinion is wanted on paying bets, I'll say right here that deliberately doing what Tex did would come pretty near taking all the honors that are; and when he put his wing right through that —— mark he did the best piece of accurate shooting I ever saw. Pay McMullen, Marfa!"

The answering cheer told two things—that the crowd agreed with Dumpy, and that the defeated rival was retiring from the field of conflict in a blaze of glory, which helped his injured self-esteem immeasurably.

Till the Wolves Come Home

by Robert J. Horton

Author of "The Man from Pondera," "The Law Comes to Singing River," etc.

THERE was blood in "Giant" Hooper's eyes; red blood born of a smoldering rage fanned to angry flames of fury as the man downed drink after drink of the white liquid that spread madness in the rarefied air of the high hills.

He slouched against the rough bar in the Miners' Home and glowered into his glass. An accident in the main shaft of the "Morning Star," necessitating the repair of machinery, had given him and his fellow underground workers on that property an unexpected holiday.

A miners' holiday is the signal for revelry. In the Big Mountain camp, so-called because of the great bald peak above it, the relaxation from toil meant cards and moonshine; maybe in the evening there would be a dance, though there were few women in this isolated section of the hills.

It was now early afternoon and the merrymaking was on full tilt. But the Giant's holiday already was over, he reflected savagely. He was broke and drinking the white liquor on credit. The proprietor of the Miners' Home did not dare refuse him; for the Giant had a reputation which embraced more than the fame which accrues in a wild country for brute strength. He was a killer.

Shortly after noon his last chip in the stud-poker game had been won by Charley Rand—"Cheerful Charley," the men called him because he had always a smile and bit of persiflage or kindly sympathy for every one. The men liked him—all except Giant Hooper, whose warped perspective on humanity was naturally antagonistic toward any one who was popular. The Giant wanted no sympathy, no cheery words.

He liked to have men appear afraid of him. He fancied tests of strength wherein he always excelled. To cross him was dangerous. He would brood for days over an imagined slight. And always he would eventually exact an apology from the cause of his displeasure or— There were vague rumors adrift in the hills concerning men that the Giant had done away with; and some of these rumors had names and dates and other details so accurate that they could hardly be classed as rumors at all!

The Giant hated Charley Rand because he had won the Giant's money—all of it. And Charley had laughed good-naturedly and had offered to lend him half of it back. That, according to the Giant's misconceived code, was the insult supreme. What Rand had intended as good-fellowship and kindness the Giant mistook for an affront.

His eyes burned with a dangerous fire as he idled with his empty glass and then pushed it across the bar to be refilled. He looked stealthily about the room at the players at the tables and those who lounged about the big wood-burning stove. Another drink and the look in his eyes became cool, deliberate, gleaming with cunning and nefarious resolve.

"Put me up a pint o' that an' I'll be goin' home," he snarled to the man behind the bar, who felt an inward glow of relief. Anything to get rid of the man. His presence in the place was a menace. Never had the one who ministered to the wants of the patrons of the Miners' Home seen a man's eyes gleam like that. He almost shuddered as he caught sight of them when he handed the Giant the bottle he had demanded.

He watched as the hulking frame of the big miner disappeared through the doorway leading to the entrance. Then he beckoned to another man playing at a table near the lower end of the bar.

"George, where's Charley?" asked the bartender.

"Gone down to our cabin," replied Charley's partner. "Why you want to know?"

"Because I don't like the look on the Giant's face," said the bartender earnestly. "He's hating Charley a heap for winning at cards this mornin' an' he's dynamite when he gits it in for a man—you know that."

"Where's he at?" asked George, looking about the room.

"Just went out with a pint of white stuff, but——"

"Drunk?" demanded George.

"No! That man don't get drunk. He just absorbs that stuff in his gorilla body and nods his head for more. But his eyes are bad, George; there's something in 'em besides liquor an' Charley ought to be careful."

"I'll be goin' down to eat in a few minutes an' I'll put him wise," said George. "An' if that fool brute ever makes a move toward Charley when I'm aroun' I'll put six lead pills in his hide quicker'n it takes to tell by a whole lot."

The bartender nodded in approval.

"Get down there soon as you can, George," he pleaded as the other turned back to his table.

Outside Giant Hooper strode rapidly down the left side of the gulch to his cabin under the lee of a rock outcropping, screened by a growth of young firs above the road that wound down toward the railroad town of Wrightsville. The ore from the Big Mountain mines was transported to Wrightsville by motor-trucks.

On the steep slopes of the gulch to either side of the road were the cabins of the miners who preferred baching to living in the boarding and bunk-houses farther up near the mines.

The cabin occupied by Charley Rand and his partner was almost directly across the gulch from Hooper's abode. Through an opening in the tops of the pines and firs that clothed the slopes Hooper could see Rand's cabin.

Only once did he look that way after he had reached home. He saw Charley in the rear of his place throwing out a pan of water. The Giant assumed that it was the water left from washing the noon-meal dishes that Rand was throwing away. He was alone; the Giant knew that for he had seen George in the Miners' Home before he came away. Yes, Rand was alone; and soon he would be returning to the card-tables, doubtless.

The Giant ground and gnashed his teeth in a wolfish rage. From a shelf near his bunk—the Giant lived alone for obvious reasons—he took down a bottle partly filled with moonshine and drained it.

Rand would be going back to play his—the Giant's—money. The man could not bear the thought of being penniless until pay-day. He was accustomed to having money. He was not used to losing money. Wise men had laid down the better hand in numerous pots against him. Rand had treated him no differently than if he had been any one of the two hundred or more men in the camp.

Giant Hooper went out and from under the end logs of the down-gulch side of his cabin he retrieved a number of stout sticks. These sticks were peculiar in construction, pointed at the ends, notched on the sides, with some buckskin thongs attached. They were tied together so they were easily carried.

The Giant returned with them to his cabin, took down a rifle and bound the sticks to the barrel and stock so that rifle and sticks could be carried in one hand. He put meat and bread in paper packages and crammed them into the side pockets of a mackinaw which hung on a peg above the bunk. The full pint bottle of liquor he had obtained before leaving the Miners' Home he thrust into his left hip pocket. Into the right he crammed the sheath, affixed to his belt, which held his six-gun.

The rifle, with the sticks bound tightly to it, he placed on the bunk with the mackinaw beside it.

A moment later the Giant left his cabin.

It was mid-afternoon when Rand's partner cashed in his checks and quit the game to go down to the cabin he shared with

Rand to eat. He stopped at the commissary store to buy some canned oysters as a treat for the holiday and talked a bit with the clerk before he went on home.

A few minutes afterward he stumbled into the Miners' Home, hatless, with face flushed and burning tears of rage and sorrow in his eyes.

"He's killed him!" he shouted hoarsely, as he dropped into a chair by a table. "He's killed Charley Rand! He killed him with his hands!"

Then, as the men in the place leaped toward him, he buried his face in his arms amid the scattered chips and cards that strewed the table-top.

WITHIN an hour a car belonging to the Morning Star Company, filled with enraged miners, friends of the dead man, had covered the distance between the Big Mountain camp and Wrightsville in the first move of the search for a clew to the whereabouts of the murderer or the direction of his flight.

The men had been eager to find the Giant; and they had carried in the bottom of the car a rope with which to avenge Charley Rand's murder.

But no trace of Giant Hooper had been found on the way down and the car turned back toward Big Mountain with its occupants again searching the snow-covered ground on either side of the road for tracks which might indicate that the Giant had turned off into the higher hills.

That period of easy weather in the mountains called Indian Summer had been terminated the day before by a cold snap and now the first snow which was to remain until Spring lay over the peaks and valleys and timbered ridges like a white shroud.

Searching-parties also had scoured the mining-camp without result. Company officials had immediately notified the county-seat authorities by telephone and the coroner and a deputy sheriff were racing toward the foot-hills in a high-powered car.

Indignation was so high among the men of the camp that no act of the authorities could have prevented a lynching if Giant Hooper could have been found. There was no question of his guilt. The man's reputation; the look of hatred he had flashed upon Rand when he quit the gaming-table; the marks of his big hands on Rand's throat after his victim had been caught from behind; the fact that Rand's money was missing and Hooper's disappearance constituted sufficient evidence of the Giant's guilt. Besides, there was the small time-book that had fallen from Hooper's shirt pocket where he always carried it, during his exertions in using his strength to kill Rand. It had been found on the floor close to where the killer had flung the body.

And although the Giant had evidently been careful to follow his beaten trail up the gulch to where it joined the road and had then walked back down the road to the path which led to Rand's cabin, when he went from his cabin to Rand's, he had cut straight across to his own cabin after the killing. This much was plain from the tracks left in the snow. But there were no tracks to show which way the Giant had gone after he had returned to his cabin.

By nine o'clock that night the coroner and Boyer of the sheriff's office had arrived. The coroner took charge of the body after he and Boyer had examined it.

Boyer listened gravely to George's recital of the affair; checked up on the evidence and confirmed one or two of the rumors concerning Hooper. Now that the Giant was definitely outlawed and gone there were those who would talk.

By the aid of miners' lamps Boyer examined the tracks and the Giant's cabin. Evidences of the hasty food-supply which the murderer had prepared and the absence of his mackinaw, remarked by several of the men, and the futile search for the rifle the Giant was known to keep hanging over his bunk were accepted as the final proof of flight contemplated before the crime.

But Boyer, in his examination outside the cabin, noticed something which had escaped the others' observation. It was a small chunk of earth and snow which had fallen to the right of the door from the dirt roof above.

"Hoist me up there, boys," he commanded. "That's it. Much obliged. Now the light."

There was silence while Boyer threw the rays of the light across the roof.

"This is the way he went," exclaimed the man-hunter; "pulled himself up on the roof and climbed to this outcropping of rock up here and went up the mountain."

"The Pin-point Trail!" shouted several of the men.

Boyer jumped from the roof and led the

way back into the cabin. "Where does this trail lead?" he questioned.

"Up around the east shoulder of Big Baldy, across and down the south side to Two-Corral Plateau," replied George; "and it's the narrowest, meanest ten miles of trail mountain goats an' Indians ever made. Five miles to the top of the east shoulder, with a precipice just before the summit where the trail's about as wide as a pin-point."

Boyer listened intently, for it was one of the few trails in the high hills that he had never traversed.

"Two-Corral Plateau," he mused. "And on the other side is Eastern Range and then a drop to the basin and the railroad. He's got a six-hour start——"

"An' he knows that trail," cut in the earnest voice of one of the men. "He knows it better'n anybody up here. I've seen him go up at night an' come back, an' go up in the mornin' an' come back with deer. He's the only one hereabouts that would risk that trail with snow on it."

"She's well named—the Pin-point," observed another.

"Well, by ——, I'll foller him up there!" declared George. "I've never been ten feet up that trail but I'll go——"

"It won't be necessary," said Boyer quietly and something in his manner convinced the men. "I'll go myself. Can I get a horse here?"

"You going to take a horse up there in the snow?" gasped a miner.

"It's wide enough for a horse, isn't it?" asked Boyer sharply.

"Just about," was the dubious answer. "There's been horses up there, but ——"

"Can I get a horse here?" Boyer again demanded. "I'll be responsible for his safety or his value, if you think there's a chance of losing the animal. Giant Hooper has left a track on that trail if he's taken it," he added.

"Rand and I had a horse," said George. "My partner won't be needin' him again an' if it'll help you get his murderer you can have him. He's old but reliable."

"Get him while I get some food to take along," said Boyer. "We've got to hurry; the Giant's got a start an' I want him before he hits the basin and a railroad."

The men talked doubtfully about Boyer's chances when the deputy and Rand's partner had hurried out.

"That snaky dark-faced —— will stick to Giant's trail till the wolves come home," said an old-timer who knew Boyer and his record for tracking men on the silent trails of the Northwest.

"An' the wolves usually get the meat," reflected another aloud.

"It's a man-sized job to make the Pin-point in the snow and at night," said one of the men.

"We'll relay a message around to Judith for a car to start out from there in the morning to head the Giant off in case he does get through," decided an official of the company. "It would take him until day after tomorrow to make the basin— Look!"

The group of men, walking slowly toward the Miners' Home and commissary store now, stopped in its tracks and gazed up the mountainside. Against the white background of snow was dimly outlined the figure of a man leading a horse.

"He's found the Giant's tracks an' he ain't losin' any time!" exclaimed the company official.

The man and the horse climbed slowly but steadily and soon were lost to sight from those below in the shadows of the sparse pine-growth that clung to the steep sides of the lower haunches of Big Baldy.

BOYER did not find the going easy. The sky was filled with fine clouds rolled so close that they appeared like curdled milk through which the moon strove to cast its rays. The wind had freshened and switched to the north; the cold increased. He had to watch closely to distinguish the direction in which the tracks left by Giant Hooper led.

The trail was barely a foot wide in places and there was always the danger of slipping over the edge. Much of the mountain on this, the north side, was shale rock, and to slip would mean one of two things: to start an earth and snow slide and be buried in the gulch below, or to be carried to the edge of a precipice and dashed to death on the rocks at its base.

Boyer was careful to plant his feet in the impressions left by the Giant's big shoe-pacs. He knew that where the trail would support the huge frame and heavy weight of Hooper it also would support him. It was the horse which worried him. Like Hooper, the horse practically was breaking a new trail, trusting to instinct, the feel of the ground, and Boyer's guidance. If it hadn't been for the horse Boyer would have been able to make better time. As it was he had to go extremely slow in the more doubtful places and increased his speed only when they reached comparatively level ground; and the level stretches of trail were few and far between.

Five miles to the summit. Boyer figured it would take him at least four hours to reach the top. But after he had crossed the summit he could mount his saddle-animal and catch up with the Giant perhaps by dawn.

The wind increased as the hours passed and Boyer neared the summit. The moon, sinking slowly in the west behind the thick veil of clouds, gave hardly any light at all. It is never pitch dark with snow on the hills, except in a storm, and Boyer hoped he would be able to make the summit before the moon went down.

A crust formed on the snow and the danger of slipping was thus lessened to some degree and the man-hunter increased his pace as his shoes sank into the snow and were braced by the crust. More than once he thanked his stars that the horse which George had provided led easily; and toward the summit, where the trail crossed level ground for quite a distance along a far-flung shelf of rock, Boyer mounted and rested in the saddle while the horse held to the trail and made good progress.

Rounding a small clump of jack-pines, the horse stepped along a narrow bit of trail and then to a place where the side of the mountain rose almost sheer on one side and dropped off in a precipice on the other. It was too late for Boyer to dismount and lead the animal across this dangerous piece of trail. His left stirrup overhung the precipice; there was no room to dismount on the right. He couldn't back up; he could only go ahead.

He let the reins lie loosely on the horse's neck as the animal, sensing the danger that threatened, picked its way carefully on the narrow ribbon worn into solid rock, covered with crusted snow wherein the tracks of the Giant led truly on.

"It's the pin-point near the summit," muttered Boyer to himself, and held his breath.

He could see the place in the trail ahead where the sheer wall of the mountain fell away. The man-hunter came near to praying as they approached the narrowest part—the pin-point from which the trail took its name—and when the horse stepped across it his right thigh scraped the rock wall. For an instant which seemed all the time forever the horse swayed outward over the chasm below.

Boyer's throat throbbed with a sharp pain of acute anxiety and he drew in his breath with a gasp as the horse crowded past the point. But just as the animal stepped to the level stretch, where the walls of the mountaintop broke away and the precipice ended, there came a blinding flash and a loud report that reverberated in rolling echoes among the peaks.

The horse fell forward on its knees, throwing Boyer over its head on to the level stretch of trail. Instinctively Boyer went for his gun and as he drew it with lightning speed from beneath his mackinaw a forefoot of the struggling horse struck his wrist and knocked the weapon out of his hand to the steep slope below. He struggled to his feet and leaped clear of the horse just as its struggles carried it over the edge of the trail down the bit of slope to the end of the precipice and over.

A thud from far below sounded dully and then the stillness again fell over the mountain. Boyer, crouching on the trail, disarmed, his weapon swept down the slope and over the precipice before the sliding body of the doomed horse, stared at a point just above the trail where the pin-point ended.

The moonlight filtered dimly through a rift in the clouds and Boyer saw a crude tripod upon which was fastened a rifle—a rifle which now tipped barrel-end down from its support, pulled into that position by a string which the horse had pushed against for the reason that it had been stretched tight across the trail.

Boyer understood now why the Giant had gone up that trail of an evening and gone up again in the morning and brought back deer. He had planned to kill Boyer or whoever might take his trail in the same cowardly way he had killed his game.

The shot which had probably killed the horse had been fired from a *set* gun.

Boyer inspected the gun and detached a piece of cord which had been fastened to the trigger, run through the rear of the guard and then stretched across the road. The trigger had been filed to a hair.

The Giant had set the gun without dreaming that any one would come along the trail on horseback; and Boyer, riding, although he had meant to walk on the worst bit of trail, had escaped death by a narrow margin. The bullet intended for him had killed his horse.

He now had no advantage over the fugitive. Indeed, the Giant's start of several hours gave him an advantage over Boyer. Boyer examined the gun and found two cartridges in the magazine. His six-shooter was gone so he ejected the empty shell and threw a fresh load into the barrel. Two shots. The Giant doubtless had a pistol.

Without further delay Boyer hurried up the remaining piece of trail to the summit of the pass and began the descent on the south side. The feeble rays of moonlight disappeared. The wind continued to blow directly out of the north. The clouds piled up and when dawn finally came Boyer had reached the upper rim of Two-Corral Plateau—a long stretch of tableland that reached to the final range of mountains in the east beyond which lay the vast prairielands cut by the railroad.

Boyer saw a low-hanging veil of cloud ahead. It was sweeping across the plateau, rapidly shutting off the view of the mountains to the eastward. Boyer knew the meaning of that gray veil. It was a blizzard racing down from the north. Already more than half of the plateau, miles across, was behind that curtain of blinding, stinging snow swept on an icy wind.

Boyer hesitated. He could not see the spot where the two sheep corrals which gave the plateau its name were situated, but he knew about where they were located. He studied the lay of the land through the binoculars which he always carried.

Running almost directly from where he stood in the probable location of the corrals was a ridge in the flat surface of the plateau. This ridge was very slight. Boyer was not at all sure that he would be able to follow it. He knew the danger of getting lost in a blizzard; knew how easy it was to become confused in the blinding snow when it would be possible to see only a few feet ahead.

But somewhere out on that big flat behind the blizzard curtain was the Giant. His tracks led toward the corrals. Boyer could follow them for a way but soon these tracks would be obliterated by drifts or be mere slight depressions in the falling snow. He could not depend upon tracks. There was just a chance—a long chance—that he could follow the narrow ridge.

Would the Giant take refuge in one of the shacks at the site of the corrals or would he try to push on through?

Boyer decided to follow the tracks as long as they were discernible or until they might leave the narrow ridge; then he would endeavor to follow the ridge to the corrals.

After that—? It would depend upon what he found at the corrals if he reached them. If he failed to reach the corrals in the blizzard he could expect nothing save death.

Boyer stepped ahead toward the approaching curtain of snow.

THE man-hunter did not believe that Giant Hooper had been able to cross the plateau before the blizzard had descended upon him; nor did he believe that the fugitive would be successful if he attempted to cross the open space from Two Corrals—if he had reached that point—to the eastern range. To cover that stretch in a furious blizzard with no trail to follow and nothing to establish a sense of direction would be an utter impossibility.

With this conviction in mind, Boyer hurried out upon the flatland. He had covered less than a mile when the swirling curtain of snow enveloped him. He pulled his cap down close over his eyes and kept his gaze upon the tracks left by the Giant, and the barely discernible rise of ground which he was following. In a few minutes he found it impossible to distinguish the rise of ground except by the feel of it. The tracks soon were filled with snow. It became bitter cold and the wind hurled the snow against Boyer's face with a velocity which caused him to crook an elbow below his mouth to retain his breath.

The stinging flakes smote his eyes until they smarted and burned with a thousand furies. He could see less than three feet ahead and had to lean far forward in his effort to make progress against the ferocious blast. He pushed on as fast as possible, keeping his gaze riveted upon the thin depressions in the white carpet underfoot which marked the trail taken by the Giant.

And then, after a rush of snow-filled wind marking one of the wildest moments of the storm, Boyer turned his face back into the blast to discover that he had lost the Giant's trail. He retraced his steps for a short distance but could not bring himself to determine that the almost imperceptible dents in the wind-tossed surface of the snow which led southward were the Giant's tracks.

If this was indeed the Giant's trail it would be entirely wiped out by wind and snow in less than an hour and Boyer did not dare leave the ridge which he was following. He could feel when he stepped one way or the other to the more even surface of the flat for the crest of the ridge was studded with sandstone outcroppings common in the region of the Little Belt Mountains.

Thus if the ridge held until Two Corrals was reached Boyer would at least be safe, for there he could find shelter. At Two Corrals he expected to find the Giant. It would be utter and senseless folly for the Giant to attempt to cross the remainder of the plateau in the storm with nothing whatever to guide him.

The man-hunter, accustomed as he was to putting himself mentally in the shoes of the men he traced, felt certain that if the Giant had reached Two Corrals he would wait in one of the shacks there until the fury of the storm abated.

Boyer plodded on along the ridge. The snow was getting deeper and deeper, retarding his progress. And now he had a new factor of the storm to reckon with. He stopped frequently and rested the rifle in the snow while he fanned his arms and hands about him to stimulate circulation. He was feeling the cold—the bitter, biting cold of the north country that often drops to forty degrees below zero. Boyer knew it now was ten or so below zero, perhaps twenty; and he hadn't reckoned on being out in the storm. His gloves were not the mittens necessary for protection against such weather. He was in danger of freezing his hands and even his arms. His face was numb where it was exposed to the blast. At times the wind even bit through the thick woolen fold of his mackinaw.

It seemed to him that the end of the day must be at hand when after a vigorous hand-pounding he drew a sandwich from a pocket and ate the cold, hard bread and meat.

When he resumed his battle with the storm he came to the end of the ridge. The gentle rise flattened out and Boyer found to his dismay that the faint limestone outcroppings did not extend to Two Corrals.

He was caught in the blizzard without means of guidance to the safety which he felt was near at hand. Somewhere ahead, at no very great distance, were the shacks used by the sheep-herders at Two Corrals in the Spring and Fall when the sheep were taken into and from the mountain-range in the forest-reserve.

Boyer could retrace his steps back across the part of the flat he had covered to the mountains; but to return to the mining-camp by the Pin-point Trail in such weather would be impossible. And darkness would most certainly overtake him before he could even reach the mountains.

Safety now lay in only one direction—ahead, in the teeth of the storm.

Boyer stooped down and unwound the laces from about the tops of his shoe-pacs. With numb fingers he tied the ends together. This might aid him to regulate the length of his steps—prevent his taking shorter steps on one side and walking in a circle, perhaps. Somewhere he had heard of this being done. Anything was worth trying in such an emergency.

After restoring the circulation in his hands and arms as much as he could he started ahead, stepping the length permitted by the fastened shoe-laces. For his only guide he kept his face as near as he was able into the wind. He tried carrying the rifle in the crook of his left arm and jamming his gloved hands into his mackinaw's side pockets but this did not restore warmth to them.

It became darker and darker and when the dusk amid the swirling flakes had nearly deepened to night, Boyer felt something across his chest and legs.

His heart stood still as he groped with numbed, nearly frozen fingers and felt the strands and barbs of a wire fence.

He had reached the site of Two Corrals.

TO FIND the location of the shacks Boyer had only to follow the fence but this proved a considerable task as he did not know whether to start out to the right or the left. He decided upon the left and made his way with difficulty to the northwest corner of the corral. There was a second corral, Boyer understood, east of the one he had reached; providing he had come upon the west corral.

He kept a close watch for signs of the shacks or other shelters and it was dark when he came to a break in the fence on the north side and stumbled across some posts piled close to the wire. Just to the north of the pile of snow-covered posts he made out a shadow—a blotch somewhat darker than the dim space of snow-filled air about him.

He swerved around the end of the posts and brought up against the tongue of a herder's wagon. With a throaty cry of joy he fumbled with numbed fingers at the lower half of the split door of the wagon and pressed out the plug which held the hasp to the staple. He crawled inside, dragging the rifle after him.

In the reaction of relief from the wind-driven, blinding snow, his blood tingled to his finger-tips and gradually he regained the use of them. In the corner of the wagon between the door and the side toward the east was a stove. Boyer felt some pieces of wood under his feet on the rough board floor—kindling which had been left by the herder who had used the wagon last. He drew his knife, made some shavings and soon had a fire going. He rubbed his hands over the blaze; then, going outside, he obtained snow, which he applied to his frosted cheeks and chin until the life returned to them. He piled on more wood, and soon the wagon, which was covered in prairie-schooner style with tar paper and boarded up in the rear and front, was warm. He left a lid off the stove and in the blaze made out that the wagon was bare of cooking-utensils or food-supplies although there was considerable wood piled up behind the stove. The bunk at the rear of the wagon contained a straw mattress but no blankets.

Boyer, thankful for the shelter which had saved his life, was soon thinking of the Giant's plight. Had the man reached one of the shacks or another wagon? Boyer took the presence of the wagon to indicate that the shacks were no longer being used—perhaps they were no longer there. The herders would pick up the wagons when they brought the sheep in the Spring on the way to the Summer range. Had Hooper found shelter?

Boyer devoured another sandwich and then, after replenishing the fire, sat on the edge of the bunk and relaxed after his struggle through the storm. Any further attempt to find the Giant this night would be sheer madness. Boyer rose frequently to build up the fire for the wagon's interior chilled rapidly. He estimated that it was thirty to forty below zero, outside. Once he fell asleep but in less than an hour he awoke, shivering, to find the fire had died. He built it up again and once more he dozed in the resulting warmth.

Suddenly he sat bolt upright in the bunk, every nerve strained as he listened intently. The fine drive of the wind against the top and side of the wagon brought a new sound—the shrill cry of a man.

Again he heard it—shrieking, frenzied laughter.

For a moment Boyer wondered if the battle with the raging blizzard had played a trick with his mind for the time being.

No! There it was again. High-pitched notes of a human voice riding on the wind from the northeast. Giant Hooper, lost and wandering to his death in the storm?

Boyer leaped to his feet. To venture away from the immediate vicinity of the wagon and the corral-fence would mean death unless he could be lucky enough to find them again. He lighted a piece of pine stump, rich in pitch, which he found among the wood by its weight, and searched the floor and sides of the wagon by the light of the flaming torch.

With a grunt of satisfaction he found what he was seeking—a ball of cord. Men working in isolated sections always save every bit of string and cord against the many uses to which it can be put. The herder who had used the wagon had left the cord where he had kept it, in a small box nailed above the miniature cupboard.

Boyer took the rifle, pulled on his gloves, built up the fire again, and crawled out through the lower half of the door. He fastened the loose end of the ball of cord to the top spoke of a wheel of the wagon. Then, holding the ball in his palms carefully so it would unwind, and squeezing his left arm against the rifle held between his arm and side, he struck off into the storm toward the direction from which the voice had come.

It was pitch dark; the stinging wind and snow made him gasp; the bitter cold bit through his gloves, cap and clothing. Boyer had almost reached the end of the cord ball when he heard the cries again, close at hand. There were sobs and shrieks of laughter and guttural mutterings and then Boyer came upon a bulky figure stumbling in the snow.

Boyer recognized the figure from the descriptions he had had from the men of the mining-camp. It was the Giant. The Giant gone mad in the storm.

With this discovery Boyer was confronted by a new problem. How to get the man back to the sheep-wagon? He could not push him ahead for there was the cord which they must follow to be certain of reaching the wagon. Would the Giant resist if he tried to lead him; perhaps attempt to kill him?

While Boyer was considering this the Giant lurched and fell in the snow. Immediately Boyer remembered that the fugitive's strength must be about spent. He stooped and with one arm helped the man to rise. The Giant leaned against him, laughing, sobbing, gibbering—out of his head.

Boyer locked his left arm in the Giant's right and as he did so he felt a bulge of hard metal beneath the other's mackinaw. He stuck the rifle in the snow and, holding the cord in his left hand, he reached under the Giant's mackinaw with his right and secured the Giant's pistol. This he slipped into the right-side pocket of his own mackinaw. Then Boyer tied the end of the cord to the rifle, and, holding the rifle and holding his man up and helping him with his left hand and arm, he struck back along the trail to the sheep-wagon allowing the cord to slip through the fingers of his right hand as he walked.

The Giant seemed to sense dimly that he was being assisted to safety and despite his ravings he stumbled along with Boyer's help until they came at last to the wagon and got inside. The Giant lay on the floor until Boyer had rebuilt the fire. Then, with his rescuer's assistance, he got up on the bunk.

An empty bottle fell from his pocket and Boyer knew that the cold had done its work against the false stimulant.

As the interior of the wagon warmed the Giant fell asleep.

THROUGH the rest of the night Boyer tended the fire and kept watch over the Giant who tossed and turned and twisted his huge muscular frame upon the bunk until at times the whole wagon was shaken by his contortions.

In the warm reaction from the storm Boyer experienced difficulty in keeping awake. Once he dozed off completely and came back to consciousness to find the Giant staring at him with eyes that glowed like orbs of fire in the cold.

"Sheep-herder!" muttered Hooper in a fleeting moment of regained mentality.

When Boyer had rebuilt the fire in the stove the fugitive had again become delirious. The man-hunter reflected with satisfaction that Hooper probably would mistake him for a herder even though he might be lucid in the morning. How long would they have to remain in the wagon? Until the storm abated, that was sure; and when the man-hunter remembered the bare aspect of the wagon and the senselessness of a herder's being there long after the sheep had been taken to the basin he knew that the chances of the Giant's believing him a herder were negligible.

Toward morning the incessant whine of the wind became less pronounced. Boyer, instantly alert, listened hopefully as the fury of the gusts diminished to an occasional flurry. With the advent of dawn the wind ceased entirely and Boyer looked out the upper half of the wagon door at a white world, crisp and cold.

When he turned about and closed the door he saw the Giant regarding him intently with a burning gaze in which, however, the light of returning reason gleamed. And even as Boyer met the other's look he saw that Hooper entertained no misgivings as to Boyer's identity.

Boyer withdrew from his pockets the last of the food which he had brought with him. Half of this he handed to the Giant.

"Better eat," he cautioned. "We've got a ways to go."

The Giant complied greedily, watching Boyer the while with eyes cruel and cunning.

Boyer was minded to put the handcuffs on his captive; for he realized that if any chance offered the big man would not hesitate to kill him. The Giant must have discovered the loss of his gun. The butt of the weapon peeped from the sheath which Boyer wore over his regular coat. He had taken off his mackinaw while in the wagon, as he had taken off the Giant's while the latter slept, so that the heavy garments would be felt when they went out into the forty-below weather.

When they had finished eating Boyer handed the Giant a small can of snow-water which he had melted on the stove and allowed to cool on the floor. The Giant drank greedily.

Boyer again thought of the handcuffs but refrained from putting the irons on the Giant's wrists because it would increase the man's task of walking ahead, as Boyer planned he should do, to make a trail in the snow.

Boyer threw the Giant's mackinaw to him.

"Put it on," he commanded, as he drew the gun from its sheath and laid it on the window-shelf within easy grasp while he donned his own coat.

The Giant had not spoken a word, nor did he speak when they had put on their coats, pulled down their caps, donned their hand-coverings. The Giant had warm fur-lined mittens. Boyer held the gun in his gloved right hand as he stepped out ahead of the Giant and motioned for him to follow.

"Go on ahead, Hooper," commanded Boyer, pointing east to the low-lying range of mountains which separated the high plateau from the basin.

The Giant's eyes blazed with hate and rage but he did as he was told and struck out through the snow which was two feet deep.

Boyer followed, stepping in the tracks left by the big man. The air was almost still and Boyer realized that they faced an ordeal which would tax their strength and endurance in the long march through the snow with the temperature around forty or fifty below.

The big man plodded on; but now and then he would turn and dart a swift and venomous glance over his shoulder at Boyer, who continued to hold the gun in readiness in his right hand.

"We're going down into the basin, Hooper," said Boyer evenly on one of these occasions. "We've got to make the basin before night or freeze to death up here. I guess you know I'm taking you in for the murder of Charley Rand and I've no intention of letting you get away or of freezing to death myself. If you make one false move I'll shoot you and leave your carcass in the snow for the coyotes."

They passed the farther end of the west corral and came to a space of about a mile between the west corral and the east corral. Soon they passed familiar depressions in the snow and Boyer learned the secret of the Giant's plight the afternoon before. The man had swerved to the south before the storm to find level ground where the walking was easier than on the limestone ridge, had got into the storm and walked into the space between the two corrals where he had gone about in a circle. When the cold became so severe he had had recourse to the bottle and the fury of the storm had done the rest.

They left the second corral behind and before noon reached the low-lying eastern range. The sheep-trail was easily discernible and they worked their way up this to the summit of the range and down the other side. As they neared the higher rim of the basin the Giant plainly became more nervous. Safety was in sight, he reasoned, if he could escape from the trailer behind. He shot furtive glances over his shoulder at frequent intervals while he slapped his mittened hands about his body to bring the life back into his fingers.

But always when he glanced back he saw the gun in Boyer's right hand aimed directly at him and caught a warning flash in Boyer's steady black eyes.

As the afternoon wore on the cold became more and more intense. The Giant stopped frequently, staring straight ahead when he did so, to fling his arms about him. When he looked back he saw Boyer holding the gun in his right hand while he also slammed his left arm about his body to beat out the terrible numbness. The faces of both men were numb, senseless to feeling, and both knew their cheeks were frozen.

As dusk began to gather the pair lurched around a point of the last low ridge and saw the basin stretching out before them. A lump came into Boyer's throat as he saw an automobile in the white road before the ranch-house nearest to them.

The Giant halted suddenly and turned. His eyes burned in dangerous half-decision. He took a step toward Boyer. It was the last, the only chance he would have to attempt to get away. He took another step.

The gun in Boyer's gloved right hand was held as it had been held all afternoon—aimed directly at the Giant. And now that the Giant had turned about it was aimed at his heart.

"Take one more step, Hooper, and I'll fire!" cried Boyer in deadly earnest.

Hooper hesitated.

Boyer spoke again.

"Move along, Hooper, unless——"

The man-hunter's eyes glinted with the sinister threat.

Slowly Hooper turned and started on. Life, even though its span may be limited with the end in sight, is nevertheless a thing to be cherished and preserved.

And then Boyer saw men come running from the ranch-house below, plodding through the snow toward him and his prisoner.

"He's got him!" shouted one of the men as they came within speaking-distance. Boyer recognized a deputy from the town of Judith. "We came out this way in a car after we got a phone message but the blizzard stopped us," cried the deputy in explanation as the men came up.

Two of the men closed about the Giant.

Boyer held out his right hand with the gun grasped firmly in his gloved fingers. "Take it off," he said quietly.

The deputy from Judith started. He reached out and with an exclamation of awe twisted the gun from Boyer's stiff fingers. As he did so the Giant leaped toward Boyer with a howl of rage. The men bore him, fighting and clawing, to the snow-covered ground and slipped on the handcuffs.

The deputy swore fervidly in admiration.

"If that brute had known Boyer's fingers were froze stiff to that gun an' that he couldn't have pulled the trigger to save his life he would have killed him with his hands!" he cried.

Boyer smiled wanly and pointed toward the ranch-house.

"I'd rather lose my right hand than lose a prisoner who's just naturally no good on earth, but——"

"You ain't going to lose either," shouted the Judith deputy. "We'll have you to a doctor in an hour and you can start Giant Hooper on his way to be hung tonight!"

SINGSONG OF AN OLD KLONDIKER

by Richard Butler Glaenzer

TODAY because I'm idle, I fret and fume and bridle,
As fussy as a tomtit on the handle of a pump;
I pace my room or slouch about
With nothing much to grouch about
Beyond the fact the market's dull, the weather on the jump.
I catch myself a-gushing over days when I was mushing,
The old days, the gold days, the clear Alaska cold days,
When I was after millions but more nearly up a stump.

It certainly is funny what men will do for money—
The comforts and the pleasures and safe berths they'll sacrifice;
Yet stranger how on Easy Street
Their thoughts swing back to Breezy Street.
Is it because its dogs are dogs, its men not meek as mice?
At all events, I'm pining for the days when I was mining,
The rough days, the tough days, the Nome and call-your-bluff days,
When hanging on was —— on earth and home seemed paradise.

the Village of the Ghost

a complete Novelette by Harold Lamb

Author of "Law of Fire," "The Curved Sword," etc.

"YES, *sahib*, it is undoubtedly true. There is a devil in the castle, and that is why no one else will sleep there."

Jaswat Das, *khitmatgar*—butler—inclined his head gravely and Sir A. Cunningham did not smile. Years of service in the Honorable East India Company and as Resident of the Jumna district of upper India had made Cunningham very well acquainted with the demonology of India. Moreover he knew that Jaswat Das, his butler, was relating the common talk of the countryside.

It was the year of Our Lord 1802 and the two white men sat under the *chenars* by the Jumna River bank just outside the walls of Agra. Squatting on the ground in front of them, the butler looked from his master to the stranger.

"How do you know, Jaswat Das, that there is a demon in the castle if you have not seen him?" inquired Cunningham.

The other white man asked no questions, contenting himself with listening closely to what the native said.

"Because, *sahib*, the men of the village have seen him. Sometimes the demon takes the form of a snake and sometimes that of a deadly sickness. When he is in his own body he looks like an old man with long hair and a face the color of old ivory; he wears a black *khilat* that covers his human body down to the ankles so that no one can tell what his form is really like. He has lived in the castle for a hundred years and it is said he once inhabited the form of the daughter of the *potail* (proprietor) of the village."

"Then why," pursued the Resident, "did the demon slay the two *sahibs* who went to Bhir when he has never molested the villagers?"

"The two *feringhi* died because they slept in the castle of Bhir that was the demon's home."

"Aye, Jaswat Das, that is true. But natives—even the *potail*—have slept in the castle at various times and have come to no harm."

The *khitmatgar* nodded understandingly.

"True, *sahib*. Yet you do not remember that the folk of the village when they wanted to sleep in the castle always made holes in the walls first. Then they lighted fires within and rushed about, firing their weapons and making great outcry. In this way they made a spell and the demon did not hurt them."

"Yet if the people of Bhir did not make offerings to the ghost, it would attack them?"

"Assuredly, *sahib*—either in the form of a snake or a sickness. Their women folk would be childless and their cattle would die."

"Very well, Jaswat Das. Still, in spite of their fear of the ghost of Bhir castle, the villagers and the merchants endure the demon, you say?"

Patiently Jaswat Das explained, knowing the wisdom of his master and suspecting rightly that his story was for the benefit of the strange *sahib* who sat in uniform and with a sword at his belt beside the Resident.

"Aye, *sahib*, it is so. For Bhir has waxed prosperous since the coming of the ghost who takes much wealth, but gives more. The merchants have rugs and store of gold in their houses—and fair wives."

Cunningham frowned thoughtfully at this. The district of Bhir, beside the great river Jumna, had long been a thorn in his side.

"For how much silver," he asked the butler, "would you take up your abode in the castle of Bhir?"

The dark eyes of Jaswat Das widened and he salaamed.

"*Ai*, my lord—I am but a poor *khitmatgar*. In my *sahib's* command are many soldiers who are paid to be killed. Give them the silver and a piece of gold for their families and let them die. Has not the demon of Bhir castle slain travelers who came within the district? Have not strangers dropped out of sight overnight, without a trace of the manner of their going?"

"Enough, Jaswat Das. You have my permission to depart."

WHEN the two Englishmen were alone Cunningham turned to his companion with a smile that was not altogether merry.

"There, Malcolm, you have the native side of the mystery of Bhir. Let me add a few words of my own to show how heavily it weighs upon the success of our affairs in the district."

Punctuating his remarks by prodding his cane into the dust at his feet, the Resident explained that following upon the signing of peace between the English and the Nawab of Oudh, the Northern Provinces had been established along the Jumna. Rajputana was on friendly terms with its white allies. Everything had gone well except in the district of Bhir—a fertile district, eagerly exploited by Portuguese traders a hundred years ago.

In that quarter a malignant force had been at work against the *feringhis*. This power for evil had been located in the ruins of the castle of Bhir—a citadel built by a long-dead raja and deserted for three generations.

"It began with the death by sickness of Mr. Powell, a commissioner of the company, three years ago. He was robbed of his revenues after he had established himself in the castle. The fortress, you know, overlooks the countryside, the highway and the river, and seemed to him the most suitable and honorable quarters.

"And then, last year a worthy gentleman who was my friend took over the office of magistrate and collector of Bhir. He also availed himself of the castle. Certain hostile manifestations of an uncanny nature alarmed him—so I am informed by his native cook who fled the place before him—and he was hastening back to me when he disappeared. He literally vanished, horse, revenues, servant and all, on the highroad."

Cunningham sighed.

"Added to the untimely death of these two kindly and respected gentlemen is the loss of several couriers sent by them to me—both English and native troopers. We were never able to trace them after they started forth on the highroad. Nor were we ever able to learn how they died."

With that the Resident rose and began to pace back and forth, his ruddy face palpably worried. His young companion gazed reflectively at the river.

"Bhir," mused Cunningham aloud, "is attracting miscreants and malcontents who believe that we fear to send a magistrate there. They think the proprietor-ghost is friendly to them, and hostile to us *kafirs*—unbelievers, you know. The mystery is still unsolved, and unless we can occupy the castle Bhir may become the keystone in an arch reared against our rule in northern India.

"Anticipating your natural questions, Captain Malcolm," he resumed, "I will add that none of the neighboring rajas is unfriendly to us. Nor have the people of Bhir displayed untoward feelings openly. The ghost alone stands revealed as our enemy.

"And now, my dear Captain Malcolm," he concluded, "what do you make of the tale of Jaswat Das?"

John Malcolm, who had not spoken until then, shrugged square shoulders. Two years before he had led the first embassy from the company into Persia; and at that time he was known as a veteran of Seringapatam.

He had been in the Indian service since childhood and possessed a familiarity rare in those days with the native languages and manners. Malcolm's homely face was expressionless; his uniform and accoutrements were more than a little travel-stained. Cunnigham, a stickler for the niceties, fancied that the new officer sent to him from Calcutta seemed dull, even indifferent.

"Nothing very palpable, sir," responded Malcolm. A Scot by birth, he was reticent and slow to express an opinion.

"But, zounds! My dear fellow, your experience with the natives must have taught you something. I am informed that you can do wonders."

"I regret, sir, that you have been misinformed." Malcolm surveyed his muddy boots gravely, noticing that the Resident was glancing at them with some choler. Cunningham was brave in finery of lace and red coat, London cut. "What is your own opinion of the deaths, sir?"

"Ha—you do not know?" The Resident chose to forget that Malcolm had dismounted only that morning from a week's ride to Agra. "I judge that the story of the ghost has been devised to frighten us away from Bhir. Within Bhir are a number of wealthy Muhammadan merchants, who have bribed the lawless elements of the ghost's village to kill our officials. Poor Powell, for instance, did not die until a month after leaving the castle. He was poisoned, because, Captain Malcolm, no physician could diagnose his illness."

"He died here, at Agra?"

"Yes. But my other friend vanished on the way hither—a victim to some of the same cursed native witchery"—Cunningham checked himself—"trickery, I should say. Do you not think I am correct in this?"

Malcolm considered his dusty boot through a half-closed eye.

"And you say that strange natives, travelers on the highway, were killed on this road?"

"Yes."

"Then you, sir, can not have the right answer to this. Because the men died, not in the ghost-village of Bhir, but *after* they had left Bhir."

The Resident, chagrined, coughed and took snuff without offering it to his companion.

"Moreover," pointed out the Scot mildly, "it—the mystery of the ghost—can hardly be merely an attempt to frighten us, sir. Not if other *natives* were killed by the same agency."

"Hum." Cunningham smoothed the lace at his throat moodily. "I repeat, sir, it is all part and parcel of the same damnable plot against me—against us."

A quick smile rendered the Scot's hard face agreeable.

"Sir, you will permit me to appeal to your own knowledge of native superstitions. Ghosts, to a Moslem, are nothing supernatural; and to a Hindu they form part of his religion. A native is seized with an epileptic fit; his family pay tribute to the suspected ghost; the man, perhaps, recovers and all is well—if he dies the ghost was not sufficiently propitiated. Haunts, distemper and demon-ridding are all part of their scheme of existence."

"Well, sir?"

"It would never occur to the Bhiris to frighten away *sahibs* by a tale of what is to them perfectly natural phenomena."

"Ah." There was respect in the Resident's ejaculation. But it was with a dry smile that he drew a folded yellow sheet from the pocket of his coat. "Here, Malcolm, is evidence to support my view. Powell brought it back with him, having found it in the possession of one of the Bhir landholders."

Malcolm studied the sheet and saw that it was a lease deed, made out in the ordinary form, dated about a hundred and twenty years ago. The lessee was a Moslem of Bhir and the deed was made out on behalf of the ghost of Bhir.

"Sheer hocus-pocus," shrugged Cunningham. "Powell related that even up to three years ago all deeds in Bhir village were made out with the ghost as proprietor."

"And so, because Powell and the other usurped the place of the ghost, they died."

Cunningham laughed uncertainly.

"You believe that? Really, I am surprized! Why, the name of the ghost-proprietor appears——"

"As Dom Gion. A curious name."

"More fiddiededee! It is not even the name of a native."

"Well, sir." Malcolm looked up seriously. "Jaswat Das assured us that the familiar spirit of Bhir wore a full-length black cloak —which is not a native garment. In fact it smacks of the, ah—demoniac. The deed is not a forgery. You have asked for my opinion——"

"I have sent for you, to that end."

"There *is* a ghost in Bhir, somewhat old, of the name of Dom Gion."

"Ridiculous."

"Or a demon, if you prefer."

"Absurd!"

"But unfortunately true. This deed relates that a stated tax is paid the ghost by Bhir. Powell and the other displaced the proprietor-spirit, and cut off its perquisites. Consequently they suffered."

Cunningham looked helplessly at the deep blue expanse of the river and the jungle mesh on the other side beyond which lay Bhir.

"Yet the travelers on the highroad—the natives, you know—did not trespass so," he muttered.

"Their fate was the product of sheer malignancy. Sir, you know the existence of a cult in northern India that worships Kali, the All-Destroyer. I think we will find a center of the cult in Bhir and that our friend the ghost plays his part therein."

"Zounds!" Cunningham's handsome face was utterly serious. He, too, had heard of Kali. "We must not let Bhir go. No matter how many sentries are killed off, a sentry post must be maintained, sir—at all costs." He took snuff vigorously. "Now, Captain Malcolm, what precautions does your experience suggest, on behalf of the next officer I detail to the post?"

Malcolm considered.

"I'll go," he said.

"Eh, what?" The Resident stared at his young companion. "You, sir? My dear Captain Malcolm, I could not call upon you, when my own men have vanished in Bhir and poor Powell—the only one to leave alive—died of an unknown disease."

"If you will be so good, sir, as to appoint me magistrate and collector of the district of Bhir for a time sufficient for me to investigate this matter? The ghost, you know, must be laid."

Cunningham was troubled. He had sent for the young captain of Sepoys to get his advice, which the Resident valued; now Malcolm had volunteered for the dangerous post. The peace of the Northern Provinces demanded a white man should remain in Bhir.

"Confound me—I'm cursed if I don't accept," he acknowledged frankly. "Provided you will keep in touch with me. How many men shall I detail to go with you?"

"None."

"Will you have your camp established near the river? It is safer than the village."

"I think," smiled Malcom, "I'll camp in the castle of Bhir. It won't do to give up our chosen post, you know."

Cunningham laughed.

"Man, you are stark mad, but I'm blest if I don't like you for it. Do you take snuff, Captain Malcolm?"

II

IT WAS a few days later that Rawul Singh, a Rajput veteran, returned to his home in the Bhir valley after a long absence in the wars.

Since the truce with the English the Nawab of Oudh had dismissed a great part of his soldiery without pay; the great chief Ranjeet Singh had sheathed the sword, and Rawul Singh would not serve under a Mussulman leader. So, having played his part in the recent battles with the English, Rawul Singh was glad to see the roof-tree of his hut near the Jumna road. He yearned to see his daughter, who was just reaching womanhood, and his son of ten years who would presently run forth to welcome him.

Rawul Singh brushed up his truculent white mustache and swaggered in his saddle as he touched spurs to his tired horse. The silver ornaments on his harness were few; the purse at his girdle was empty.

He was one of those good-hearted, utterly brave men who can not prosper, who are a prey to the merchant and money-lender, and who are born to be led, not to lead. Over his shoulder was a shawl, bought for Tala, his daughter. In one hand he held a small bow and arrows for the boy.

In order to purchase these he had fasted on his journey.

"*Hai*, Tala! *Hai*, little lion—it is thy father who calls. Fear not!"

Smiling, he leaped from his horse and strode into the hut. It was in neat order, but empty. So also was the cattle-pen beside it. Rawul Singh laid down his presents and frowned. It was evening and his children should have been in the house, and the cattle penned, for there were jackals about.

Convinced that the girl and boy must be in the village in spite of the late hour—because the aspect of the house revealed that they had been there not later than noon, as the ashes of the fire were still warm and water in the jars still fresh—Rawul Singh remounted and rode on to the outskirts of Bhir, no more than a gunshot away.

Overhead towered the crumbling walls of the castle outlined by ruddy shafts of sunset. As the Rajput passed, hurrying to escape a storm that was overcasting the sky behind him, an eye of light winked out from the battlements of Bhir castle. Rawul Singh noticed it as he did everything within his field of vision.

A moment later his keen glance picked out a white blotch in the dull glimmer of the road. It was his daughter's shawl, worn threadbare.

The Rajput looked quickly about, marking the place where the shawl had lain.

Within the village men turned away from Rawul Singh, and yet stared after him when his broad back was toward them. No one could tell him anything of his children until a water-carrier in a dark corner of the bazaar muttered that the boy and girl had been in the village that afternoon, to ask after Rawul Singh. The boy had stood guard over the cattle outside the wall while Tala made her inquiries. They had started back a good hour before twilight.

"Didst thou see, *bheestie,*" asked Rawul Singh, "this shawl upon the girl?"

"Aye." The carrier of water bent over his goatskin. "Her face is like the moon, good sir. She smiled at me and her eyes were like dark stars. Perhaps another looked upon her beauty. Beware of the man of Bhir castle who wears a cloak."

With a hiss of rage the soldier clutched at the beggar, to learn more. But the *bheestie* and his goatskin had vanished into the shadows of an alley. Rawul Singh remembered that more than once he had given silver to the man.

At the house of the *potail*—village chief—a servant looked long into the Rajput's dark face and shivered.

"*Ai,* Rawul Singh," he whispered, "the heart of the honorable *potail* has turned to water at news of thy grief. He can not give aid, and knows naught of the fate of thy children—except this. There is a *feringhi* in the castle who has seen the face of thy daughter and lusted after her. When the sun had changed (in the afternoon) this day, he waited for her and the boy outside the village gate——"

"And the boy?" interrupted Rawul Singh, speaking very slowly and distinctly.

"He defended her, and he was killed by the *feringhi.*"

"Who buried him? Where?"

But the servant, looking into the stricken face that was thrust near his eyes, turned and fled.

Rawul Singh loosened the folds of his turban and drew them down over his brow so that no prying eyes should behold his grief. Sitting very erect in the saddle, he rode back to his home, pausing only once when he came to the place where he had sighted the scarf, to glance up at the ray of candle-light that winked from the castle.

He could make out a break in the jungle mesh where a path ran from the road in the direction of Bhir castle. A hot wind was blowing the dust of the road into his face and the treetops were threshing under the approach of a storm.

"By Ram and Vishnu, by the sun-born gods and Siva," breathed the Rajput, "may I be avenged for this day!"

Dismounting before his home, he took the shawl of Tala and wrapped within it the two gifts he had brought for his children. The bundle he laid at his feet and squatted on the earth floor.

He was praying that the gods would bring the body of his enemy within reach of his sword. On the morrow he would seek out the body of his boy and show it to the murderer.

Outside the hut lightning flashed and a rush of rain swept over the jungle. With the rain came the sound of horses' hoofs. A man pushed open the closed door of the hut and entered.

Apparently he had not perceived the occupant of the place, for he busied himself with a lantern, striking steel on flint until he had it lighted. Captain Malcolm faced Rawul Singh.

"I am the *sahib* from the castle," said the Scot. "The storm has driven me under thy roof. What is thy name, Rajput?"

He spoke Hindustani fluently. Rawul Singh did not rise as Malcolm expected. Instead he sat on his heels, his black eyes boring into the gray eyes of the visitor. The Rajput had fasted for two days, except for the stimulant of *bhang* that he had chewed as he rode. The influence of the drug had left his nerves frayed.

"Thou art welcome," he said quietly. "I will tell thee my name."

Silently he watched Malcolm tether his horse under the eaves of the hut, beside the Rajput's steed.

"*Sahib,*" observed Rawul Singh between his teeth, "the gods have brought thee hither, out of the castle in the storm. It is as I prayed."

"Nay," answered Malcolm carelessly. "I was riding by the river on my way to the castle when the storm made the path impossible."

"Hast thou many servants, my *sahib?*"

"Not one."

"Then hast thou lied. For a light was in the towers a short space ago. No one dwells there except thee, Malcolm *sahib*. Where is Tala?" He rose lightly. "Thou dost not know that I am Rawul Singh whose home thou hast made a desolate place. Verily, the gods brought Malcolm *sahib* to my door."

The Scot's searching glance sought the wild features of the native, and his feverish eyes.

"Drunk or mad," he reflected, "and armed to boot." Not otherwise would a native have interrupted an Englishman or threatened him. Aloud he said—

"Stand back!"

But Rawul Singh leaped, his short sword flashing out as he did so. Crazed by his grief and his mind inflamed by the drug, Rawul Singh struck at the white man. A Ghurka or Maharatta would have knifed Malcolm from behind.

The Scot had barely time to draw his sword, a sturdy weapon of the hanger type. The two blades clashed, parried and clashed again. Rawul Singh was the better swordsman but was handicapped by his blind rage.

Repeatedly he threw himself upon the Scot, his breath hissing between his teeth. Once his blade slit Malcolm's coat. The white man retreated slowly around the lantern that rested on the earth beside them. He had no chance to speak, or to do anything but keep the flashing curve of the other's weapon from his throat. And then Rawul Singh dashed out the light with a kick of his heel.

"——!" said Malcolm heartily.

He heard the Rajput laugh and the laugh came nearer. Quite easily Malcolm might have thrust his sword into the reckless native, but he shrank from doing that and stepped aside softly. The *swish* of a steel blade sounded at the spot where he had stood.

"Aha, my *sahib*, thou dost not stand thy ground—as a man should. Yet thou didst slay my son who was the light of my eyes and the meat of my liver——"

Rawul Singh fell silent, listening and the Scot tried to stifle his panting breath. The native was between him and the door.

A second time Rawul Singh leaped, as noiselessly as a cat leaps. At the same instant a flicker of lightning revealed him to Malcolm, against the opening of the door.

The white man dropped to his knees, let slip his sword, and clutched his foe by the waist. The impetus of the Rajput's rush carried both to the earth where they rolled, crashing against the table.

Malcolm felt the sweat of the other's body strike his face as he gripped the snake-like sword-arm. The greater weight and muscle of the white man told on the other and in another moment they lay quiet, Rawul Singh pinioned in the Scot's arms.

CATCHING a fold of the native's turban in his teeth, Malcolm shook it loose and, taking care not to relax his hold, with one hand bound the man's wrists and ankles behind him. It was well for the white man that Rawul Singh was exhausted by his efforts.

Then the Scot lighted the lantern and sat down on the low table to recover his breath. To the average English officer Rawul Singh would have appeared merely insane; but Malcolm was puzzled.

"I'm thinking," he muttered, wiping the sweat from his hands, "that there's a method in his madness." Aloud he added: "Tell me the story of thy grievance, Rawul Singh. I am the new *kotwal* (magistrate) of Bhir."

"*Pani sara kyun?*" (Why does pure water wax putrid?) snarled the other.

But fearlessly, as was his nature, he unfolded the nature of his wrong, believing that whatever happened he would die.

Malcolm listened to the grieving story as stonily as Rawul Singh spoke.

"A forked arrow, Rajput," he said at length, "can strike down two birds at one cast, and a forked tongue is a serpent's tongue."

"Nevertheless, the *bheestie* spoke truly; my heart told me he did not lie."

Malcolm nodded impatiently.

"He said naught of me, Rajput; he said to beware of the man of Bhir castle who wears a black cloak. Nay, Rawul Singh, where is thy wisdom? Many men must have made away with thy children and cattle, if they were not to be seen when thou didst ride to the village. Alone, I could not have driven away so many head of cattle in so short a space of time. Also would I have come thus, like a blind pig to thy house? Nay, throughout this afternoon I was engaged in marking the boundaries of the fields beyond the village. A score of men will tell thee so."

Rawul Singh looked at the white man and was silent. Hot-headed as he was, he could understand when a man was speaking the truth.

"Why did this evil come upon me?" he muttered. "Lo, it was to tend the grave of my wife who died upon the journey that I remained in this accursed nest of Mussulmans. They are not my people nor my caste——"

"And because, Rawul Singh," mused Malcolm, "there were evil-doers in this village, they wished to be rid of thee, even as they desired to slay me. They learned the hour of thy return; they took the cattle, Tala and thy son. Then the servant of the *potail* lied, and thou didst believe." He frowned thoughtfully. "And you saw a light in the castle?" he muttered in English.

"Yes, *sahib*," agreed Rawul Singh, who understood.

Malcolm wondered if the invisible foemen who had struck their first blow at him that night through Rawul Singh had actually taken Tala to the ruins. He thought not. But then who had made the light?

"Rawul Singh," he said abruptly. "If I were the murderer of thy son, would I let thee live, to be revenged upon me?"

"Nay."

"Yet I will do thus. I trust the faith of a Rajput chief."

So saying, he undid the knots in the man's turban cloth and picked up his own sword, sheathing it. Rawul Singh expressed no pleasure.

"Why should I live?" he said. "My son who was the blood in my veins is no more and my daughter has come to shame. My beard is dishonored and my name is no better than a dog's. Let the jackals tear open the grave of my wife that I and those two have tended and watered the young willows by it. *Ai*—it matters not."

Malcolm turned away from the grief of the old man, to hide his own sympathy. There was no way to console Rawul Singh nor would the Rajput have thanked the Scot for attempting it.

The rain was still beating down and Malcolm decided to remain the night where he was. Under the circumstances he judged the hut safer than the darkened castle where the other men might be waiting for him in the storm. He slept fitfully on the low divan that had been built for Rawul Singh's children.

Waking, he found the sun well up and the Rajput squatted beside him. There was a new light in the eyes of the old man.

"*Sahib*," he said at once, "your servant sought the road before dawn and the place where the scarf had been. Listening, he heard jackals snarling and found them scratching at loose stones. The stones were piled upon a new grave. *Sahib*, I have looked upon the dead face of my son, who was strangled to death and his belly slit with a knife."

Malcolm rose and checked an exclamation of pity.

"And thy daughter, Tala?"

"Her body I did not find. The slayers of my son have taken her alive with them. It is my thought that she is kept in this neighborhood, because the slayers could not sell her, knowing what she does of their crime. Likewise, in Bhir are many hiding-places on the hill-slopes near the castle where they would be safe."

The Rajput seemed to be on the point of saying more. The sight of his son's body had stirred him to tense excitement. But, looking at Malcolm, he was silent.

Making a mental note that the old man knew more than he was admitting, the officer asked another question.

"Knowest thou the slayers?"

"If that were so, I would not be standing here, wasting words," Rawul Singh grunted. "*Sahib*, natives have done this thing. Not one but many, of a powerful band. They cast dust in my eyes, so that, almost, I slew thee. That was for a purpose. So also are they keeping Tala for some other purpose."

It was a long speech for the Rajput to make, and Malcolm knew that his anger was aroused to fever pitch.

"*Sahib*," he concluded, "before I met thee

I made a vow. Suffer me to be thy servant for a space; then may I come upon my enemies, for the wisdom of the *sahib* can find them."

Thoughtfully Malcolm considered the matter. He had brought no attendants from Cunningham's establishment because he had not wished to have any strange natives about him—although his dignity in Bhir suffered accordingly.

He knew, however, the hereditary loyalty of Rawul Singh's race and realized the value of a trained fighter who knew the terrain. It would be a happy stroke to ride into Bhir village attended by the man who had been almost tricked into murdering him.

"Very well," he agreed.

Gravely the Rajput took his hand and placed it against his forehead. Then, stepping back, he said impassively:

"The *sahib's* horse is groomed and fed. Will the *sahib* mount now or partake of food?"

Under his arm Rawul Singh clutched a bundle done up in a shawl that contained the bow and arrows he had meant for his son.

IN THE small stone chamber opening into the main hall of the castle—the quarters Malcolm had appropriated for himself—he found his saddle-bags, desk and portmanteau as he had left them.

But upon the bags were several drops of a glazed white substance.

"Candle wax," decided Malcolm, examining it.

Inasmuch as the Scot used lanterns in preference to candles, and as he had noticed no wax there before, he judged that a visit had been paid to his quarters during the night.

"The ghost, it was, my faith! I'm thinking 'tis not a proper spirit if it must light its way. Well, it would find little worth among my papers."

Malcolm's outfit was purposely meager and the more important papers, money and reports he always carried on his person.

The boldness of the visitor of last evening could have only one explanation; whoever had searched his belongings had known that Malcolm was away from the village and that the Scot might be detained by Rawul Singh.

When he first came to the spot Malcolm had made a careful examination of the castle. It was solidly built of finely shaded sandstone, much corroded; its deep moss-coated cellars were basalt, as was the great hall, where decaying vegetation covered the floor.

All around the undergrowth was thick—junipers and thorn bushes pressing against the crumbling walls and lush grass growing thick on the *dahlan*, the front terrace.

The cellars were half-filled with foul water at their lowest level; openings in the thick stone walls were few and sunlight penetrated only feebly into the chambers of the dead raja. Malcolm judged that it had been unoccupied for three generations at least. Perhaps because of this, a strong odor filled the place.

Yet he was certain that the terrace and the slender, square tower had been visited frequently. The soft ground had been trampled by feet whose outline he could not make out; moss had been broken from the tower top and the damp slime on its steps was scored in more than one place.

"The demon," thought Malcolm, "does not quarter himself in the castle but comes here from a near-by haunt. Very well, we will watch for him."

They saw nothing out of the ordinary, however, for several days. Thick mango groves covered the *nullahs* below the rise where the castle stood. Often jackals and leopards passed by, but the village cattle were kept at a distance by the herders and no human being approached them.

Malcolm, going about the routine duties of his office, was struck by this isolation of the castle. He had observed that the signs pointed to its having been occupied before he came.

This led to the conclusion that the person who had lived in or near the castle before Malcolm arrived had vacated the premises in his favor; also, that the villagers who had been in the habit of coming to the castle now made a point of avoiding it.

"It looks," he thought, "as if my neighbor demon had had friends in the village. If—as the series of murders indicates—our distinguished ghost is a servant of Kali, a goddess to whom murder is an acceptable ritual offering, his friends might well be the slayers of Rawul Singh's son. And I think the Rajput knows they are Kali-worshipers, although for some reason he will not admit it to me."

When he was not in attendance on Malcolm, the Scot noticed that his follower spent hours in casting about through the jungle around the village, and that whenever Malcolm went to survey the boundary lines, Rawul Singh made a thorough search of the hillsides.

Furthermore the Rajput reported that he had tried to find in the village the servant of the *potail* who had lied to him about the fate of his daughter. But the man was not to be found. And the lips of the *bheestie* who had warned Rawul Singh were sealed by fear.

So no trace was found of Tala, although Rawul Singh was convinced that the girl could not have been conveyed from the district of Bhir without his knowing it.

Taking all this into consideration, Malcolm believed that the man who called himself or was called the ghost had Tala in his keeping, and that both were very cleverly hidden in one spot that all Malcolm's surveying and Rawul Singh's search could not locate.

This spot might well be a rendezvous of the worshipers of Kali, who, having enjoyed unlimited power in the rich district of Bhir, now sought the extermination of the English magistrates.

Before many days had passed Malcolm fell sick.

The Scot had grown pale and his eyes were heavy. He was listless at times, although he never ceased his work. His orders were to assume the duties of magistrate, and he went about the work of measuring the boundaries, taking the census and holding a criminal court.

Malcolm's condition puzzled himself. He had no fever; the water and air were good; Rawul Singh, who feared poison, gathered their food in the village, taking pains to select his own rice and flour and to kill his meat by hunting.

One day the Rajput absented himself and returned with a lean, dirty native, naked except for a loin cloth and turban. It was an old man, watery of eye, who trembled in the presence of the English officer.

"This is Cheetoo, the *bheestie*," explained Rawul Singh. "And he will eat of the food we share and sleep without thy door. Thus if thou hast a plague, we will know of it, because either he will catch it or he will confess what is the evil that attacks thee. If he refuses I shall cut out his liver."

Cheetoo's trembling increased and he looked around fearfully.

"O Sun of Benevolence," he cried, "do not make me sleep within the castle."

"There is nothing here to harm thee," said Malcolm impatiently. He was irritated by his own indisposition.

Cheetoo glanced at the ruins and renewed his pleading.

"Peace!" muttered the Rajput, aside. "Twenty silver rupees wilt thou have, son of a pig, if the *sahib* gets well. If he dies, thy liver will be fed to the jackals as I promised. Do not think to escape, for thou knowest I will hunt thee down——"

In this manner Malcolm's party increased to three. The *bheestie*, torn between fear of the castle and dread of Rawul Singh—coveting the unexampled wealth of silver rupees and tormented by visions of what might happen to his own organs—Cheetoo went so far as to urge Malcolm to pitch his tent outside the walls and to shun the interior of the ruins.

The Scot took this as an attempt to get him to give up his quarters in the home of the rajas and lose dignity thereby. Rawul Singh whetted his sword and looked meaningly at the native's bare limbs.

"In the village bazaar," chattered the *bheestie* mournfully, "it is said that the *sahib's* breath is in his nostrils. He will soon be dead."

Malcolm had noticed how the natives stared at him and whispered behind his back. He had expected resistance when he collected the revenues from the land-holders and the wealthier merchants; no one in this hostile province withstood him, but the eyes that looked into his were covertly mocking.

It got on his nerves—which few things did. He had expected to find an antagonist in the castle; he found no one. In the first week of his stay he had nearly been slain by a clever trick of his invisible foes. And now the sickness was gaining on him. His head throbbed and his sight was blurred. It was harder than ever to sleep.

III

ONE night he wakened at a slight sound near his head. Sleeping lightly as he did, he was fully conscious on the instant. Soft, regular breathing mingled with a rasping snore from the open doorway of his chamber assured him that Rawul Singh and Cheetoo were dreaming away as usual, just outside.

Malcolm reached for a pistol quietly and lay passive. The only other opening in the walls of his room was the broken aperture of a round window from which many stones had fallen away. Through this he could see clearly the panoply of stars over the blur of the jungle. On this opening he focused his attention, for the sound had come from that quarter.

Several of the stars were blotted out. Malcolm sat up silently and raised his pistol. He waited, scarcely breathing, for what seemed many moments; and then the faint light from the round window was darkened further.

Malcolm was puzzled. He had expected that the object, whatever it might be, that had come into the opening would continue its progress within his room. Instead, another object had appeared in the window.

Resolved to investigate, the Scot slipped from his bed and moved to the door in his stocking feet. At once Rawul Singh's heavy breathing ceased and the white man was aware of the Rajput standing beside him in the dark.

"Some one is outside," whispered Malcolm. "Come."

He felt that the Rajput accompanied him along the hall, to the gate of the castle—the way being familiar to both. Stepping cautiously out on the terrace, they examined the wall without result until Rawul Singh drew a quick breath and grasped the arm of the white man.

"Above, *sahib*," he breathed; "look at the tower."

Twenty feet overhead a figure stood on the summit of the square tower, outlined against the stars in the faint light of a new moon. Malcolm saw arms raised to the sky and the arms were knitted to the body like those of a bat. The head appeared very small compared to the grotesque body.

Malcolm shivered, believing for the moment that he was looking at a man in the form of a bat. Tales of were-wolves that he had heard in his youth in Scotland flitted into his mind; he thought of the Witches' Sabbath and the night when evil spirits cast themselves into the air from a great height.

"A bat," he whispered.

Checking the momentary play of imagination, due to his weakened condition, he ordered Rawul Singh to stand watch on the terrace while he went into the tower. It was built, as was generally the case in fifteenth century structures in Rajputana, against the corner of the castle and a postern door opened into it from within the front passage of the main building.

There was but the one door and through a window Malcolm could see the tall form of Rawul Singh watching from the terrace below. Up the stairs he went, pistol in hand, his heart beating heavily.

The circular stairs were narrow and Malcolm was sure no one could have passed him. Yet when he stood on the tower summit it was vacant and there was no sign of the visitor of the night.

"If it was a bat," growled Rawul Singh, "it flew away, *sahib*, as you climbed up. It vanished into the air."

Disturbed, the Scot did not sleep again that night, and with the first light of dawn he inspected the tower anew. He was convinced that nothing could have got by him on the steep stairs, nor was there any opening in the wall by which the apparition might have leaped to the terrace unheard—if that had been possible—by the Rajput.

One thing attracted his attention, and that was a portion of vine displaced from its hold on the stone upon the side of the tower away from where Rawul Singh had stood—the side of the tower that had been in deep shadow the night before.

The Rajput tested the strength of the vines and found that they broke under his light weight.

"It was not thus, *sahib*," he shook his head, "that the demon came down."

"Yet he must have come down," pointed out Malcolm irritably. "How long had he been gone from the tower top before I reached it?"

Rawul Singh considered.

"The space of time that a man might hold his breath without pain. That I know well, for I held mine until I saw thee. Nevertheless the time would not suffice for the bat"—so the old man chose to think of the visitor of the night before—"to escape out of the tower through the door within the castle before thy coming."

"So, you saw me look out of the window half-way up the stair?"

"Nay, how could I see through the shadow that was like a cloak?"

The explanation of the Rajput worked logically enough in its own bent. Since the bird-like visitor of the night had been seen at the tower top and had not been seen on the ground below, it must have vanished between tower and earth and hence its appearance had partaken of the supernatural.

But Malcolm, frowning, reasoned that since the bat-man had not come down the stairs and had not climbed down the vines, he must have done, logically, just one thing.

He had run down the stairs, on seeing Rawul Singh appear on the terrace, as far as the window. Hearing Malcolm coming up from below, the man had climbed through the window, working down into the vines which had broken under his grasp, and had thus fallen to the terrace beside Rawul Singh.

If this were true—and Malcolm could not believe otherwise—Rawul Singh had held back information again, just as before when he had failed to admit that he knew the slayers of the highway to be servants of Kali.

Cheetoo gave it as his opinion that the ghost of the castle had been on the tower and had flown away on the back of a *ghil*—an invisible spirit of the air.

BUT Malcolm, inspecting the window that opened into his chamber, was certain that two large stones had been added to the ruins of the wall within the opening. It had been these stones, he reasoned, that he noticed against the starlight. Some one had pushed them into the window as noiselessly as possible.

Taking pen and paper, the Scot wrote to Cunningham as follows:

> To the Honourable Sir A. Cunningham, Resident of Jumna:
>
> SIR:
>
> As regards the occupant of the Castle, formerly alluded to by yourself as the Ghost, I have to report that he has visited the tower wearing his long cloak which creates a resemblance to a bat.
>
> This personage has means of entering and leaving the aforesaid Castle unseen. He is endeavouring to wall me up in the Castle, or at least to close the openings of our quarters so far as possible without being perceived. That is a curious matter. Owing to a distemper that has attacked me, I beg that you will send at once a detail of soldiers to convey the revenues to Agra in safety, as I am bedridden.
>
> Yr. most obed't. servant,
>
> MALCOLM.

This message Rawul Singh sent off by a *chit* bearer.

"Dog and son of a dog," said Rawul Singh to Cheetoo, "soon thou wilt dig thy grave, for the illness of the *sahib* gains upon him."

In spite of the Rajput's care and his own fight against the poison that was entering his system, Malcolm had been forced to take to his cot.

At this Cheetoo moaned and tore at his scrawny beard. Conflicting fears reflected themselves in his emaciated face, and the fear of the Rajput's steel overmastered his dread of the Scot's enemies.

"*Ai*," he whispered shrilly, "the poison that is killing the *feringhi* is in the air of the castle. Know you not, O blind buffalo, that a man can not live where fire will not burn?"

Rawul Singh was perplexed by this. Air, to him, was the same everywhere, and the idea that their enemies might have poisoned it was absurd. As for fire, it was true that they did their cooking on the terrace, yet they carried their lanterns about the castle.

He went to Malcolm with the message, and the Scot pondered it. They had both noticed the dank, vitiated odor of the place but had accepted it as natural.

"Light one of the lanterns, Rawul Singh," ordered the officer. "Bear it first out upon the *dahlan*, then into this chamber, then down to the lowest cellars. Observe carefully whether the flame diminishes or not."

The soldier obeyed and came back more puzzled than before.

"*Sahib*," he reported, "this is a strange thing. On the *dahlan* the flame was big and strong. Here, it is not so strong. In the lowest prisons it dies down to a hair."

Malcolm stared from the lantern to his friend and whistled reflectively. He had not observed this peculiarity of the light as he had not visited the prison. He remembered that Cunningham's servant had said that passing natives forced by chance to quarter in the castle overnight always made openings in the walls. And this circumstance joined itself in his mind with the fact that the bat-like visitor had been trying to close the opening in his chamber.

Moreover the natives lighted fires and rushed about, clamoring and waving their weapons to scare off the deadly spirits of the place. This would be a very effectual way of displacing the vitiated air—the dank, curious-smelling element of the place.

Displacing the air—that would only be

necessary in case it was heavier than ordinary air.

"Carbonic acid gas!" he exclaimed. "Comes from the stagnant water and decayed vegetation and the general decomposition of this old ruin. It hangs low of course and it's little better than rank poison.*

"My friend the demon," thought Malcolm, "was not satisfied with the rate of my demise; he wanted me to get the full benefit of the bad air by walling me in. Especially as he wanted the revenues, which would have gone to his own lease deeds. No wonder the doctors couldn't find out what was the matter with poor Powell."

Whereupon he ordered Rawul Singh to pitch on the terrace against the castle wall the tent he had brought with him to use in hunting expeditions. Then, aided by Cheetoo, he took up his new quarters. That night and the next he slept well for the first time in weeks. Rawul Singh kept watch on the terrace.

On the third evening the Rajput, well-pleased, went to where Cheetoo was lying at the other end of the terrace by the fire.

"The *sahib* gains strength," he growled. "He will live. So, thou also wilt live."

Cheetoo did not answer and Rawul Singh, looking a second time, saw that he was dead, a cloth girdle wrapped around his twisted throat and his belly slit open by two slashes in the shape of a cross.

Unwinding the girdle, the Rajput brought it to Malcolm, who observed that it was such a thing as was used by a Moslem for a waist sash.

"God receive his soul," he said moodily. Fingering the stout sash, he observed to himself:

"A *rumal*, or strangling-cord of the slayers who are thugs—worshipers of Kali. Did Cheetoo die because he warned me, or was his death to be a warning?"

They buried the *bheestie* without delay at the edge of the jungle and as Malcolm helped Rawul Singh roll the stones on the grave—he could do little more, being still weak—he turned to his companion thoughtfully.

"Are the two slashes of a knife across the stomach of the *bheestie* similar to the mark of a knife that thou sawest upon the body of thy son?"

"Aye."

"Dost thou know, Rawul Singh, that when a certain band of murderers calling themselves thugs slay a victim they slash open the body in this manner before burial? They do this so that the gas contained within the human body will not swell the corpse, thus disclosing the place to jackals or dogs that might dig up the body and so reveal the traces of the crime."

Rawul Singh hesitated.

"Aye," he admitted, "that was known to me."

"And didst not reveal to me thy knowledge that we were dealing with thugs? Is this thy loyalty to thy master?"

The Rajput folded his arms and bent his head, his lean features working under strong emotion.

"Perhaps thou didst think," Malcolm accused, "that if I knew there were thugs in Bhir I would have fled and deprived thee of my aid in seeking revenge?"

"Nay." The other's head jerked up quickly. "I have watched thee, *sahib*, and I know thee for—a brave man."

"Words." As Rawul Singh was stubbornly silent, the officer hazarded another guess. "Thy daughter—the thugs hold her and have threatened her with harm if thou didst disclose their secret?"

"Nay. That may well be, yet no word of it has come to me."

"What, then?" The Scot was frankly puzzled by the demeanor of his follower.

THERE was no doubting the menace of Bhir, if there was—as he believed—a *thuggi* band in the village. Throughout the central provinces of India it was becoming known to the English officials that these slayers, who at first were supposed to be merely dacoits, infested the main villages and highways. The native officials were often bribed and more often powerless to interfere with them.

The thugs formed a fraternity made up of every caste and profession. By day they appeared as reputable merchants or craftsmen; by night they assembled in bands to seek out victims carefully selected, and—as they believed—fore-ordained to their hands. The cult was handed down from father to son, and its existence was just becoming known to the English officials.

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*Several hundred English soldiers died after leaving their quarters in ruined Indian castles, before the carbonic acid gas was discovered and the men forbidden to occupy the ruins.

Rawul Singh had escaped the effect of the gas for the reason that the Rajput had slept in the great hall of the castle where the air was better, and had never come into the castle except to sleep.

So much Malcolm knew. Cunningham's story had led him to suspect there were thugs in Bhir. What puzzled him was that, until now, the native slayers had not ventured to number an Englishman among their victims.

Moreover there was the peculiar individual known as the ghost to be accounted for.

"What, then?" he repeated grimly.

The reply of the Rajput came like a flood when a dam is loosed. Malcolm's accusation had stirred his sense of honor, which was very high indeed.

"*Sahib*, it is true that thou couldst aid me in my revenge, and that these words—if they are overheard—may mean the death of Tala. I have sworn to serve thee. Judge whether I am faithful to my oath. Two *sahibs* that were here before thee were slain. Thou art a brave man. Thou wouldst not go from this place until the revenues were collected. As it is, the thugs seek only to drive thee away, or to harm thee secretly. Once they suspect that thou knowest their secret, thy fate is sealed. Thou wilt lie beside my son."

He pointed quietly to the grave of Cheetoo.

"Thus! But there is still a chance for thee to escape. I say—go.

"*Sahib*, thou art well enough to travel. Mount, then, this night for Agra and ride fast. If there are thugs in Bhir, they have marked thee for slaying. Know, *sahib*, that secrecy is the veil that shields the servants of Kali; my son they buried, but Cheetoo they left under our eyes. That means that they have determined thou shalt not leave Bhir, to report their presence. Otherwise they would have dragged away the body before slashing it and we would have thought that a tiger had struck him down."

"Yes," acknowledged Malcolm, "I thought of thugs when I first heard the tale of the servant of Cunningham *sahib*. But what of the man who visits the castle and who is my enemy?"

"I know not. But consider this." Rawul Singh pointed at the fresh mound of stones. "*They* know now that thou wilt not die by the poisoned air, nor by my sword. So they may attack thee at once."

"Yes," said the Scot dryly.

"I will stay, *sahib*, and search for Tala alone. But you must go at once."

"No."

That night two men watched on the terrace where the moonlight threw a jagged shadow from the walls of the ruins. Under the tower where his outline blended with the wall Rawul Singh squatted, his drawn sword across his knees.

Lying on his cot in the tent, Malcolm watched, pistol in hand, the play of light and shadow over the cotton roof. He was wondering whether Rawul Singh was not an ally of the man in the cloak—who took upon himself the resemblance of a demon—Rawul Singh, who might have slain the unfortunate Cheetoo, and who was now urging him to fly from Bhir, which was the thing his enemies wished.

Tossing on his cot in the hot hours of early night, Malcolm could hear the sounds of the near-by jungle, a buffalo crashing down to water somewhere at the edge of the rice fields—an owl hooting—the slipping passage of a leopard—the snarl of a jackal.

Wearied by his sickness, his senses sharpened by edged nerves, Malcolm felt that hostile forces were gathering around him. He knew that he was cut off from his kind—the *chit* bearer who had been gone ten days had not returned. Worst of all, he wondered whether he could feel certain of Rawul Singh.

Through the opening in his tent he could see the moonlight on the roofs of Bhir village, could glimpse a torch passing down the bazaar front or a turbaned group of men moving quietly across the central square.

These groups merged together, and lights danced across his eyes that persisted in closing with the lengthening of the night. It seemed to him as if the beasts of the jungle had halted in their tracks and were crouching, their eyes shining in the darkness as they looked toward him.

A cold wind blew into his face and he seemed to be lifted into the starlit air. A high voice shrilled down the wind, laughter sounded in mocking words of a tongue he did not know.

It was strange, he thought dully, that the voice in the night air should laugh. It was very cold among the stars and their light hurt his eyes. . . .

Malcolm awoke to find himself stiff from the chill of dawn and a gray light filling the tent.

Rawul Singh was standing beside him,

looking curiously at the pistol still grasped in his master's cramped hand.

"*Sahib*," he said, "while thou didst sleep I heard some one call from the tower. I know not what it was, for the words were neither Hindustani, nor Turki nor English. So, as thou didst, I ran into the castle to the tower stairs. Yet when I came to the window that looks out on the terrace I bethought me that this might be a trick to separate us, and I stayed at the window, watching and listening.

"*Sahib*, it was only a moment before I heard a man breathing very near. It was not behind me but in front of me. So I looked out, very carefully. And my face was within a foot of the face of the demon, who crouched below the window with his feet on the vines and his fingers on the stone ledge of the opening. I struck quickly with my sword, but he was more swift and dropped to the terrace. The window was too small for me to climb through and by the time I reached the terrace by way of the castle door he was gone. Verily is he a thing of the night."

Malcolm read in the man's eyes that he was telling the truth. He saw now how the visitor had eluded them on the previous night, waiting probably crouched against the tower wall in the shadow until they had left the terrace, when he had slid down easily, breaking the vine in the process.

"So," he thought, "my friend the demon is very small in body, is quite fearless, has a sense of humor and—speaks Portuguese."

"*Sahib*," concluded Rawul Singh gravely, "from this hour thou and I must keep together and one of us must always watch. I am afraid that the demon overheard our speech of the thugs."

IV

ALI KHAN was as heavy as a buffalo and as light on his feet as a panther. He was of Afghan blood and his father had been a *rokurrea*—a professional carrier of money. His grandfather had been a *Said*, so good Moslem blood ran in the veins of Ali Khan.

A square jet-black beard was his pride, with a brace of silver-chased Turkish pistols and a Persian sword that curved nearly to his heels. Ali Khan was a bold man and boastful, likewise crafty.

It was for these reasons that Rawul Singh had picked the Afghan ten days before they heard the voice in the jungle for the *chit*-bearer, to go to Cunningham *sahib*. Being an Afghan, the soldier was not one of the men of Bhir; being son of a hereditary messenger, Ali Khan was reasonably faithful to a trust—when he swore on the Koran, as he had done in the rear of a wine-shop in the Bhir bazaar before Rawul Singh.

"Send a child, Rajput," the Afghan had gibed. "The task is not worthy of me."

"Thou wilt not think so when I tell thee there will be thugs behind thee and perhaps before."

"Ho!" Ali Khan had fingered his beard. "Aho-ho-o. Well, I will go, and to Jehanum with all thugs, dacoits and slayers——"

"*Hss!*" Rawul Singh's sibilant warning had cut him short. "There be thugs about us now. Do not join company with any on the road; travel by day, and if thou dost esteem thy bull-neck dismount not from thy horse on the road; sleep in the jungle at night and then only after crossing the river——"

So had Rawul Singh spoken, as quietly as he might, but sharp ears had heard the boast of Ali Khan and before the big Afghan flung his weight upon his horse a rider had slipped out of the bazaar and passed up the Jumna highway toward Agra.

Obedient to his instructions, Ali Khan rode swiftly until dusk the first day; then he swam his horse across the river, picketed it in a mango grove and snored peacefully until dawn.

Regaining the highway, he pressed on, the letter of Captain Malcolm concealed in a fold of his turban. Passage through the jungle bypaths from village to village was more dangerous than the main road where merchant caravans, parties of soldiers and peasants were usually within sight. A group of a dozen poverty-stricken Hindus besought the protection of the Afghan on their journey.

Ali Khan grinned and bade them be off, saying that the smell of a Hindu irked him.

Toward evening that day when he was hot and thirsty a party of Moslem cloth-traders bound for Agra overtook him and invited him to camp with them that night and share their fire.

"*Bismillah!*" Ali Khan eyed them sharply; they seemed wealthy and peaceable;

there was nothing about them to suggest assassins. "I would like to, but it is forbidden. Allah be with you. I go my own way."

They persisted in urging him to dismount and pressed around him. The Afghan's beard bristled and he touched spurs to his tired horse. When he had gone on a way he looked back and found the merchant cavalcade staring after him.

"*Ya Allah!*" muttered the khan. "They were thugs."

He shared the knowledge, common among natives of India, of the secret slayers of the highway. He knew that they followed their trade only when unwatched; that they slew only when the omens vouchsafed by Kali were propitious, and that they killed by strangling.

Very rarely did they use other weapons; moreover they were accustomed to choose certain spots for the assassination and travel with the victim until the appointed place was reached, where they could bury their victims at once.

More than one courier from Bhir, he knew, lay under the grass by the Jumna highway and he suspected that the body of a *sahib*-magistrate of Bhir had been cast into the Jumna after the Englishman had imprudently joined company with a party of mild-appearing merchants.

So that evening Ali Khan said his prayers devoutly, alone. The next day brought no signs of thugs and he knew that he was no longer followed. Throughout the night he rode, resting his horse at intervals.

Dawn brought the sight of Agra's towers, and relief to the heart of the *chit*-bearer. A few hours more would bring him to the cantonment of Cunningham *sahib*, where he could sleep, eat and boast his fill.

"*Ya Allah,*" he muttered, satisfied. "I am out of the snake's nest. At the dawn prayer I will give thanks——"

He reined in beside a group of mournful-looking Moslem soldiers who were burying one of their companions in a grave by the road. The body was cleanly robed in white cloth, but the survivors stood disconsolately by, a Koran in their hands.

Seeing Ali Khan dismount and wash at a brook by the grave and prepare his carpet for prayer, one of them approached him and asked if he could read from the Koran.

"May I strangle if I can't read like a mullah," responded the Afghan.

He understood that they could not read, nor repeat the burial formula over the body of their mate. They asked him if he would do so.

"I would be a dog if I did not, and my beard would be defamed," acknowledged the big warrior frankly. "Besides, I owe such a kindness, for my life has been miraculously spared."

He cleansed his hands anew, took the Koran and knelt on the cloth by the body and the grave. As custom prescribed he laid aside his weapons, and two of the party knelt beside him.

In a sonorous voice Ali Khan began to repeat the burial service. In a moment a sash was passed about his neck from behind, the two men at his side grasped his arms and he was strangled silently.

Then his big body was tumbled into the grave; the man who had taken the part of the dead Moslem rose. A caravan of traders came into sight from Agra at that instant and the thugs, perceiving it, began to complete the burial service over Ali Khan.

Before the last camel of the caravan had passed the erstwhile soldiers had filled in the grave and Malcolm's messenger had passed from the sight of men. Only when the thugs took a folded paper from his turban did the act excite interest on the part of the passers-by on the caravan.

"Why do you take aught from the dead?" some one on the caravan asked.

"It is a message to his people—his last message," explained the young thug who had impersonated the body and who possessed a sense of humor.

THE thug who had secured the *chit* stripped Ali Khan's horse of its silver saddle-trappings and mounted, forcing the nearly exhausted beast to gallop back along the Jumna trail. His companions remained behind, to light a fire—now that the caravan was out of the way—on the grave, thus obliterating the traces of a burial. The weapons of Ali Khan they divided among themselves.

It was nightfall of the second day when the thug messenger—Hossein, by name, a *bhutote*—strangler—of the Bhundulkhand clan of Jumna—arrived at the outskirts of Bhir. Instead of entering the village, Hossein slowed down to a walk and took a cattle path away from the highway.

After following this a short distance up in the direction of the castle, he dismounted, tethered his horse and slipped into the jungle mesh. Passing silently through a bamboo thicket—no easy feat—he parted a dense mass of junipers and stepped out into a cleared space that seemed to have for its center a square black hole.

Here Hossein was very careful to give the cry of an owl, repeating it after an interval of silence. Advancing with more assurance, he stepped out upon what appeared to be the square cavity. Here a flight of steps led down and Hossein disappeared from view.

The hole was, in fact, an empty tank, or well, built after the fashion of Hindustan with stone platforms a little way down and recesses opening into the platforms. Here the wives and daughters and servants of a raja aforetime had cooled themselves during the stress of a hot season. But the sandstone walls of the tank were now dry and overgrown with weeds. A snake crawled away unseen by the boy.

Coming upon the lower platform, he turned into a recess. Here a ray of light flashed into his face and a man peered at him. Hossein passed the sentinel and advanced along a stone corridor into a small chamber lighted by a single lantern set with red and green bull's-eyes of glass.

"Tala," he whispered almost noiselessly.

"Peace be with thee, Hossein," a low voice answered.

The youth stooped to peer at the form of a girl upon a divan against the wall. Costly Persian rugs and silk brocade covered the stone floor under the divan. A tabouret containing fruit and fresh water stood by it.

The lantern hanging from the ceiling was so arranged as to cast its glow on the passage way rather than the curtained recess where the woman rested. But Hossein's sharp glance distinguished a pallid brow, circled by heavy, black hair, and black eyes that returned his stare dully.

There was something languid and indolent in the aspect of Tala stretched on the silks of the divan; there was indifference and lack of purpose in the slow movements of her eyes.

Her face, under the kohl and crimson stain, was lax. Yet it was young and wistful.

"Allah be good to thee," whispered the youth fervently, glancing anxiously over his shoulder as he spoke. "Thy beauty is like the moon and thy lips are flower petals. Happy the man who owns them!"

Tala stirred as if trying to arouse herself to consciousness of something forgotten.

"Why am I kept waiting? When will I go forth from here, Hossein?"

"Soon, soon."

"Sometimes I walk on the bottom of the tank and see the stars, Hossein."

"Thine eyes outshine the stars, Tala, little flower—delight of my life."

She put out her thin hand and touched his tunic and the heart of the thug swelled within his chest.

"Once, Hossein, I thought I heard my father speak—far above. He was crying pardon to Nag for killing a snake that had come out of the tank. Why are there snakes here, and why does not my father, Rawul Singh, come down? He is a brave man."

Hossein moved uneasily, dragging his eyes from the girl's face.

"No one comes where the snakes are, Tala. Soon, *inshallah*, you will go up to your father. But do not talk of that to him"—Hossein motioned along the passage—"who is yonder."

Lightly he touched the girl's hand and was gone. But at the curtain at the end of the passage his swagger left him and he hesitated, feeling the *chit* that he grasped in his hand.

"Enter, Hossein," came a voice from behind the curtain.

The youth stepped into a poorly lighted chamber in which the air was very stale and cool. This was of more recent construction than the tank or the recess that was Tala's abode. Sun-dried brick formed the walls, which were bare. A pallet and table occupied one corner and by the table squatted a hunched figure of a man who smoked a *hookah*.

Into the mobile, handsome face of Hossein came a look of great respect. The man on the rug lifted a hairless face the color of old ivory. His mouth was a slit, and his eyes were very large and prominent.

He held out his hand, Hossein placed in it the letter that had been written by Malcolm.

Although the light from the single candle was dim, the man on the rug seemed to have no difficulty in reading the message. His face did not change as he laid it aside.

"You had no trouble?" he asked in Turki.

"No, *jemadar*, not at all. Warning

reached us from Bhir of the approach of the big buffalo with the message. So we went out from Agra to meet him and persuaded him to read the Koran to us. That was because I played the part of a dead man, and I——"

"Enough of yourself." The man on the rug had a very shrill voice. "What are they doing in Agra?"

"They are talking together and holding council like a lot of old wives at a *dewan*, *jemadar*. They have sent couriers to Bhir—the thugs in the village cared for them, of course—and they are worried at the *sahib's* silence. Cunningham *sahib* is getting together a detachment of red-coated *feringhi*——"

"When will he come?"

Hossein smiled.

"In a week. Master, your servant took care to learn all that before we left Agra to intercept the messenger from Bhir. Aye, we of the Bhundulkhand band accompanied the *khitmatgar* of Cunningham *sahib* into the native bazaar by the Jumna bank. We buried him in the mud. But first we put a sack of hot ashes over his head and beat it until his throat was seared and his lungs were half-full——"

"Enough of your deviltries! I care not to hear of them."

"Cunningham *sahib* comes in a week—as soon as the passage of the rains and the decline of the river make the road fit for his *feringhi* devils. We promised the *khitmatgar* that we would leave him in peace if he told us. And so we did leave him—under the mud of the river."

"How many soldiers will come?"

"Tenscore of sepoys—may their beards be defiled—and twoscore *feringhi* troopers. Is it true, *jemadar*, that they breathe fire when they are angry and put a charm on their bullets?"

"Peace, parakeet!" The yellow man rose and Hossein saw that his dingy black cloak hung down to his ankles. The man was very lean, and his bones were small as a child's. Yet the wrinkles in his brown skin proclaimed him old. "You are very shrewd, Hossein, but you have not yet killed a dozen men and you know naught of the English. When they come they must find the castle of Bhir empty, without a trace of the *sahib* and his Rajput."

"Is the *sahib*-magistrate still alive?" Hossein was surprized.

"Ah." The man in the cloak smiled wryly. "It is strange that he is. He survived his first encounter with the idiot of a Rajput who was meant to slay him, and he was warned of the poison in the air of the castle."

"So, the *sahib* who took your place was not to be frightened away?"

The yellow man frowned, as if he could not understand that fact, and in his frown was something wild and vacant. A gleam of supreme cunning flashed into his dark eyes.

"It is better so. The higher powers, the wisdom of Kali Bhwani, has ordained that the *feringhi* usurper will not die until the revenues he has collected from the district and the countryside beyond Bhir—until all that store of silver and gold is at the castle. Thus will we be rewarded for slaying the man."

Hossein bowed. He was thinking that it would be good booty.

"Within four days will Malcolm *sahib* have completed the toll and gathered the revenues together," he assented. Then, in an altered voice, "But what of Tala?"

"She will have her part to play when we strike against the *sahib*."

The man had answered with complete indifference, and Hossein's eyes widened.

"Tala, the Rajput flower, must not be placed in peril! Dom Gion, I will give——"

The breath of the yellow man hissed in the face of the boy. His thin hands clutched at the other's throat and fear leaped into the eyes of Hossein.

"That name!" Dom Gion's voice trembled with rage. "You dare to speak it? Have I not said to you that I am *jemadar* of the Jumna thugs, and master of Bhir—no more?"

The boy's sturdy strength easily pried loose the lean fingers of his assailant, and at this evidence of his own power Hossein's fear was displaced by a veiled cunning. He watched the old man as a dog will eye a snake about to strike.

"To no one else have I said your name," he responded smoothly. "Am I not your servant?"

UNDER the mask of complaisance he was measuring the old man's intelligence and craft as a strong young wolf of the pack will study the strength of the old leader. Dom Gion was *jemadar*—chief—of the Jumna band of half a thousand thugs; Hossein was the most youthful of the *bhutotes*—stranglers.

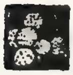
Dom Gion held the mastery of Bhir in his hand; he took toll of the wealth of its merchants, yet he gave wealth of merchandise to them—merchandise that was the spoil of the thugs' bands upon the highway.

And the countryside held him in fear as being a demon incarnate. This was because Dom Gion, who took pains not to let them see him face to face, talked to himself in a tongue that they did not know, and because the snakes of the ruins were friendly to him. Likewise his wisdom was more than theirs.

"Come, come," snarled the old man. "Indeed you are my servant and the bonds of *thuggi* hold you. The vengeance of Kali would blast you and bar you from paradise did you lift hand against me, or the thugs, your comrades. Go, and bring report to me when the revenues are complete. Think not of Tala. She is not for you."

Hossein departed, outwardly humble, yet as he went he cast a sidelong glance at the form of the girl sleeping upon the divan.

And, sleepless himself, he paced the jungle paths for many hours that night, his desire hot in his veins and his brain in a tumult. Hossein had taken from life what he coveted, and now he longed to possess Tala, who was ordained for other things by the master of the thugs.



WHILE Hossein walked the jungle Dom Gion retired to his closet behind his bed. There, it was said by the thugs who waited on him, he prayed to his image of Kali and after praying he often came forth in the form of a snake to glide among their feet and listen to what they said. And as proof of this they pointed out that Dom Gion, the *jemadar*, had no fear of snakes, nor had the cobras any dread of him.

But there was no image in the closet. Layer upon layer were placed squares of gold bullion and boxes of silver. Jade statuettes—spoil from itinerant Chinese caravans in Kashmir—jeweled rings and gems taken from inlaid weapons—for Dom Gion wore no weapon himself—strings of pearl that had been on the throats of women of Rajasthan before they were strangled to death—all in all the treasure of Dom Gion was a goodly store. And with the treasure were many dusty lease deeds made out on his behalf.

He knew every item of it. Although the closet in the rock was almost dark, he lifted necklaces of pearls and touched the shimmering balls gently with his finger-tips. For Dom Gion was a miser.

Long residence in the half-light of underground had accustomed his eyes to the dark. In large measure he had the ability of animals of the cat family to see in the night.

Because of this, and knowing the plan of the castle as he did, it was possible for him to stalk the two occupants, Malcolm and Rawul Singh, without being cornered.

Dom Gion had not slain them with his own hands because there were two of them and he feared both and they were always together.

On the wall of the closet was a painting done by an Indian artist of a harsh-featured Portuguese merchant. It was clad in the fashion of a century ago. It was, in fact, the grandfather of Dom Gion, who had taken the daughter of the village *potail* to wife.

And in one of the chests was a *firman* or deed made out to his grandfather to trade in the district of Bhir. Dom Gion—as he was called, after his father—glanced at the parchment and smiled.

V

"THOU seest, Rawul Singh," said John Malcolm, "that all signs point to our friend the demon being a half-caste. I think he is more native than white even though he wears a cloak that has the seeming of a priest's garb."

"The gods know."

"A man of mixed blood always bears in his heart a grievance against the white man. And in the tale of the *khitmatgar* of Cunningham *sahib* it was related that the demon of Bhir was akin to the daughter of the village *potail*. In Agra I made inquiries among the traders of the bazaar and they knew of a Portuguese who owned the district of Bhir during the last war with the English, three generations ago. So this man of Bhir, knowing that his authority over the district is not lawful and nursing his own enmity against my countrymen—he is the one we have to deal with. And I believe that the thugs serve him."

Malcolm frowned into the fire. It was

full moonlight without the castle and the wind was damp with the passing of a heavy rain. The two sat close to the embers, muskets at their sides. The collection of the revenues had been completed that day and Malcolm had hidden the money in the wall not three feet away, having removed a stone on the inside to make a niche for it.

It was a sorry treasury, he reflected, and, harassed and spied upon, he was a sorry figure of a king's magistrate. Nevertheless the money was there, the surveys and census completed and—he and Rawul Singh still held the castle.

"It is the part of wisdom to study thy enemy, Rawul Singh," he nodded, puffing at his long clay pipe. "Now," he went on in English, "I'm not liking this quiet. We are watched. I don't think my *chit*-bearer got through."

"*Sahib*," observed the Rajput suddenly, "it is in my mind that Tala is near us. Last night my ears heard her song, not so far away. Yet her voice was altered and I could not be sure—fearing a trick I dared not leave thee."

The Scot's eyes grew moody.

"That's a score we must settle," he thought. "This poor chap is waiting for me to give his daughter back to him and I'm blessed if I can see any way to it. We've learned that she is not in the village, nor in the farming districts. God grant she isn't dead."

"If it was a trick," the Rajput pursued the tenor of his thoughts, "it means that our enemies are girding themselves for fight. Aye, it was a warning, perchance. They will only attack us openly when all other ways are proved useless. Aye, they fear that the noise of our muskets and the sight of fighting in the castle—which can be seen plainly from across the Jumna—would bring down retribution from the *feringhis* on their heads."

Malcolm nodded.

"So," he added, "they will try to get rid of us secretly. Aye, we will not be fools enough to leave our fortress. We have food and we will wait until they come, or Cunningham *sahib* comes."

"As the gods will—it may be that Tala will come, for she is near."

Rawul Singh glanced at the jungle. Malcolm *sahib*, he thought, might have escaped weeks ago from Bhir. But the *feringhi* was a man without fear. Now it was too late; the net had closed around them, the wiles of the demon of Bhir would be loosed on them secretly so that no word would spread around the countryside that the men of Bhir had slain a *sahib*. It would be done inevitably as Powell *sahib* had been disposed of, and the other.

And now, leaning forward the better to listen to the noises of the night, he touched Malcolm on the arm.

"Danger is at hand," he whispered, "for men are coming up the path from the village.

Soon Malcolm noticed what Rawul Singh had observed—a muffled clamor on the highway beneath them. And presently he made out torches advancing up the trail to the castle. The patter of naked feet sounded in the jungle.

He leaned forward to light his pipe with an ember from the fire.

VI

THAT night the chief of the village had announced that there would be a *tamasha* at Bhir castle.

Word had been passed about the bazaar and the outlying districts by the chief's servants that the *tamasha* would be a very fine one—in celebration of the good harvest that had been gathered in. The leading men of the village, the visitors in Bhir, and the merchants would see a delightful buffoonery.

There would be fiddles and comedy-men and—the devout Muhammadans said it under their breath—a beautiful *katchani*, a dancing-girl.

All this would be for the pleasure of Malcolm *sahib*. So said the servants of the village chief. Yet he sent no word to Malcolm. Above all he was insistent that none of his friends should carry weapons, except perhaps knives that could not be seen.

Whereupon the men of Bhir began to gather in the bazaar and with them were the visitor traders, many of them acquaintances, it seemed, of Hossein, for they spoke with him in the alleys and nodded understandingly.

Another order of the chief was that none of their women should accompany them. This, in a Moslem community, was deemed quite fitting. When the slaves and the merchants of Bhir were in motion toward the castle Hossein vanished from the cavalcade.

The young thug slipped aside into a cattle path and ran swiftly up the slope to the castle, picking his way easily in the bright moonlight. Avoiding the bulk of the castle, he threaded the jungle to the side of the old tank that peered up at him from its malevolent shadow.

Here Hossein went more cautiously, keeping an eye out for the giant cobras that lived in the ruin. He did not meet any, however, nor did a sentinel of Dom Gion challenge him. Somewhat surprized, he felt his way into the corridor, calling softly:

"Tala, Tala! It is I, Hossein. I am come as I promised."

Finding that only silence answered him, he knelt, striking steel upon flint and kindling tinder taken from his girdle. Lighting a candle, he surveyed the chamber that had been the prison of the Rajput girl for the past two months.

It was empty.

Hossein muttered under his breath and ran into the quarters of the Portuguese half-caste. He knew that if Tala was absent Dom Gion must be gone from his room. The *jemadar* had not loved Tala as Hossein loved her. Rather, Dom Gion had cherished her as he might a favorite snake, as if he were keeping her for some object other than his own desire. Hossein had made sure of this by jealous watching.

Moreover, that afternoon he had found opportunity to whisper to the girl that—while the thugs and the men of Bhir were at the castle and the *tamasha* was in progress—he would take her away, on his horse, from Bhir to Agra where she would have comfortable quarters and jewels and rich silk garments.

It was a risk, but the thug did not weigh that against possession of Tala.

Hossein had mustered up courage to do this. Had he not strangled the boy that had been Tala's brother with his own hand by order of Dom Gion, unknown to her? Had his men not driven away the cattle and sold them in another village? And slain Cheetoo?

This, according to the strict laws of the thugs, gave him a claim upon the woman that Dom Gion had taken for himself. Desire to possess the girl had decided him at last to risk flight from Bhir. Was he not strong and young? True, it was only when under the influence of the *bhang* that Dom Gion plied her with, that Tala spoke kindly to Hossein. But he fancied that the use of the drug had dulled her memory of her father, and that if he took her from Bhir, she would turn to him.

As for the Rajput, Hossein had no apprehension. Dom Gion would take care of Rawul Singh and Malcolm *sahib* as well.

But now the nest was empty and the bird had flown. Hossein's dark face twisted with the hot anger of the young Moslem whose desires are his fulfilment of life and whose enmities are his religion. He strode the chamber of Dom Gion, peering about vindictively, and fearing that the half-caste had harmed the girl.

But the room with the cot was empty. Hossein's eye fell on the curtain that veiled the closet and temptation surged into his breast. No one other than the *jemadar* knew what was within there. He would look within and see the god to which Dom Gion prayed—a god that was all-powerful, since its servant was all-powerful in Bhir.

Very cautiously he parted the curtain, fearing the snakes that Dom Gion said were there. He saw no snake nor any image of Kali. Instead, Hossein glimpsed vast loot. He had not known that his master, who assumed the aspect of poverty, had treasured so much of the spoils of *thuggi*.

It did not occur to Hossein to rob his master as he might easily have done. It is one of the ethics of *thuggi* that the spoils of each member of the clan are inviolate.

But Hossein's heart swelled at the knowledge that Dom Gion had no god. There was no divinity that gave him power, not Kali the deity of the thugs—and Hossein was a devout servant of the woman-god.

"*Ohai*," he muttered. "So, my master sought to keep the eyes of men from his treasure by fear. Well, I fear him no longer."

The thought of Tala returned swiftly to his agitated mind and the boy turned to run out of the chamber in the rock and up into the jungle. Dom Gion, he knew, had gone to the castle and where he was the Rajput girl must be.

Slipping noiselessly from the undergrowth, Hossein climbed the débris of the crumbling rampart until he could see upon the terrace where a score of torches flickered in the hot wind of the night, adding their glow to the pallid radiance of the moon.

In a serried half-circle sat the men of

Bhir, with the visiting merchants. They passed the *hookah* stem from one to another. Behind them stood their young male children, gazing wide-eyed at three or four buffoons who, dressed as women and native dignitaries, danced about and sang to the sound of fiddle and drum.

The little boys laughed, with a great show of white teeth, for the *byropees*, the comic actors of the village, were very funny. They had painted their faces grotesquely and their antics as they imitated their superior lords were clever indeed.

Isolated from the gathering, Hossein could see Malcolm *sahib* and Rawul Singh sitting against the wall of the castle beside an open niche. The Scot was smiling, but the Rajput's lean face was grim.

Having carried out his orders from Dom Gion in bringing the assemblage from the village to the castle, Hossein was free for the moment and he squirmed nearer until he lay in the deep shadow of the tower.

The thug was trying to discover Dom Gion and Tala. Neither was visible; yet he knew both must be within sight of the *tamasha*.

He paid no attention to the shrill voiced *byropees*, because he knew that a sterner drama, a conflict in reality, was impending. He knew that blood would be shed and the lives of the two men sitting by the wall would be attempted, yet in such a manner as to leave no suspicion of murder in the minds of the visiting merchants or the children.

ON THEIR part Malcolm and Rawul Singh were alert and watchful, although the Scot puffed at his clay pipe tranquilly and the warrior played with the fire.

Malcolm had received the gathering from Bhir calmly and expressed his pleasure at the *tamasha*. He noticed that no one bore arms—at least weapons that could be seen—and that the young boys were with the Bhir men. This might well be meant to drive away suspicion.

Yet he could not understand why the men of Dom Gion, who he expected were present, would attempt violence before the *bula admees*—the respectable persons—among the visitors who were with them.

Only one inkling did Malcolm have of what was in store for him. A big trader made a low, mocking salaam.

"*Sahib*," the man said, "it is written that he who takes usury from others shall suffer."

Rawul Singh would have responded at once and insolently—the idea of a bazaar money-changer invoking the term usury had in it something of the farcical—but Malcolm checked him.

"The revenues of the government," the Scot said crisply, "are not a tax but a payment between friends. For what we take, we give value. Are your harvests gathered in?"

"Aye."

"Then, for this season they have not been destroyed by native raiders from other States. And tell me this: have you been forced to pay tax on lease deeds to him who calls himself Dom Gion and master of Bhir—since my coming?"

The man was silent, and Rawul Singh noted that he glanced covertly at the shadows on the right, the shadows cast by the tower.

"The man who made himself, illegally, master of Bhir," went on Malcolm with assurance, "will no longer tax you. He has slain wrongly and his reward will be that of a murderer—hanging, if we take him alive, but in any event, death."

Malcolm had been thinking of the fate of his predecessors when he spoke, but the Bhir men fancied that he referred to Dom Gion's connection with the thugs and deep silence fell for a moment.

They watched Malcolm with shifting, avid eyes. Before their eyes a contest was being waged between the *feringhi* and the master of the thugs who did not permit himself to be seen. In fact much of Dom Gion's prestige lay in his concealment within the confines of the castle. Judged by his acts, he was a man of immense power.

It was a strange thing, thought the men of Bhir, that this *sahib* should show no fear of his enemy. Dom Gion had assured them through Hossein that the *sahib* would, in the midst of the music and shouting of the *tamasha*, fall to earth shrieking with fear.

So they watched eagerly, to miss no detail of what would come.

And it came so swiftly that Malcolm and Rawul Singh were unprepared. A cloak fell away from a figure squatting beside the musicians and a woman stepped through the ranks of men. In her hand was a bare simitar.

She walked forward slowly. On her dark hair was the silver tinsel cap of a Persian dancer, and she was dressed for the sword-dance. Yet she swayed uncertainly, and her glazed eyes barely moved in their sockets.

Under the rouge the woman was very pale and by this and the dark rings under her eyes the watching Moslems knew that she had been given the heavy stimulus of drugs—probably *bhang* and opium mixed.

"Tala!"

The girl looked at her father when he cried out, but her face did not change. She had been set on her feet to do the dance that she had often given before Dom Gion. Yet, so were her faculties numbed, she could barely lift the sword or step forward. Still, she looked long at Rawul Singh.

Hossein rose from the ground, his hand on the hilt of his sword. He had not imagined that Dom Gion would allow Rawul Singh to see his daughter; the appearance of Tala, he knew, must foreshadow the blow that Dom Gion would strike. The young thug saw Tala snatched from his arms, and blood rushed to his head. For he fancied that he heard the shrill laugh of Dom Gion near him.

The Rajput girl had stepped forward among the actors, until she was only a few feet from Rawul Singh, at whom she was still gazing in a bewildered fashion.

Sight of his daughter painted and garbed for dancing, in the possession of his enemies, was like a blow in the face to the Rajput. Her indifference to him was a lash to his fierce spirit.

"By Siva and Vishnu—by the many-armed gods!" His sword came into his hand swiftly. "Wo to you who have done this thing!"

He took a step forward, his weapon raised. The actors looked at each other and their hands went under their loose robes. Malcolm caught the glitter of knife-blades, and saw the trap that had been laid for Rawul Singh. In a broil the Rajput would be slain, and every one present would swear that it was merely a quarrel over a woman.

"The girl is mine," observed the *potail* of the village uncertainly, drawing back as he did so.

Malcolm's hand checked the Rajput before another step was taken.

"Wait," he said. "It is my command."

Loyalty to his officer and fierce resentment struggled for mastery in Rawul Singh, so that he stood transfixed beside Malcolm. And then every head in the assembly became still.

The *hookah* stems were withdrawn from bearded lips; the clamor of the music ceased. A long sigh escaped the lips of the watchers.

"It is a trick," whispered Malcolm, "to make you attack them and to separate us."

Although they must have understood, none of the watchers moved or spoke. Their eyes were fastened on a spot a little to the right of Malcolm. Tala alone gave a low cry as if perception had pierced the numbness of her mind.

A yard from Malcolm's elbow the head of a large cobra weaved from side to side. The hood, fully inflated, showed the brilliant spectacle mark. The light hissing of the snake was barely to be heard under the murmur of the wind in the vines of the ruined tower.

Rawul Singh, however, marked the sound and looked down, Malcolm following the direction of his eyes.

"*Sahib*," uttered the Rajput under his breath, "do not stir. The snake has been angered."

Malcolm could not take his eyes from the reptile, whose long length coiled near his foot, the tip of the snake's tail still within the aperture of the wall—the niche near which they had been sitting.

He reflected quite coolly that if he had moved—if Rawul Singh had continued his advance to his daughter—the snake would have struck. It had appeared quite by chance—yet Malcolm had made certain in the first day of his stay in the castle that there were no snakes in the ruins.

And, as if by chance, a twig fell from the air to the earth near the cobra, which seemed to swell the more thereat.

"Dom Gion is devilishly clever, after all," thought Malcolm.

RAWUL SINGH was powerless to aid his officer, who stood between him and Tala and the snake. He was certain that no one in the assemblage would risk his life by slipping behind the snake and striking at it—the only chance of preventing it from striking.

And the bite of the snake, Rawul Singh knew, would bring death to Malcolm *sahib*. The *feringhi* might cauterize and bind the wound, but—deprived of the protection of the Rajput, other poison would be injected into him secretly—and a hundred persons would swear it was the snake that had caused his death.

He heard his daughter's cry, and his sharpened senses caught the slight sound of silk slippers on grass. Then there was a flash of steel in the shadow behind the snake.

The cobra darted its head at Malcolm, but the head writhed on the ground and there were two coils instead of one. Tala stared down at the stain on her simitar, her eyes dark with the fear that comes to one who is wakened from sleep by an evil dream.

Rawul Singh jerked Malcolm away from the threshing coils and the spectacled head that was still menacing. He snatched Tala back and peered into her face.

"Dost know me—thy father?" he said harshly.

"The snake frightened me. It was near thee." Her voice was dull and low but the glaze had passed from her eyes.

"Well for our honor that it was so and thou didst slay it."

A slight movement near them caused Rawul Singh to wheel and Malcolm to look around. His head bent in salutation, Hossein emerged from the shadow of the brush-pile where he had been standing.

"*Mashallah*, *sahib*," he smiled. "God be praised that you escaped the snake. Now that it is slain you should be safe." His words were low-pitched and held a double significance. "It is a pity that this fine *tamasha* be interrupted. *Sahib*, favor your servant by commanding that it proceed."

Politely he saluted Rawul Singh and as he did so, the torch-light flashed on rich pearls in his turban. Hossein was quite composed, for he saw his chance to play a part and to strike where he knew Dom Gion had failed.

"Tala, thy daughter," he added to the Rajput, "has long been under my humble protection. Misfortune, perhaps the fate of her brother, had unsettled her mind and she could not recall the name of her father. *Inshallah*—what is fated, will come to pass. I did not know that she would appear this night as a dancer."

Familiarly he stepped to the girl's side and looked into her face. As he did so his dark cheeks flushed for Tala was very fair to look upon. A new excitement had added its luster to her eyes.

"Is it not true," he asked her softly, "that I, unworthy Hossein, have spoken of love to you? Have I not been gentle to you?"

Malcolm, who had been staring up at the sky whence the stick had fallen near the snake, turned and looked quizzically at the girl. She half put out her hand to the thug, then frowned as if uncertain of her feelings.

Rawul Singh surveyed the placid Moslem youth fiercely, and glanced jealously at his daughter.

"I have been sick," she repeated slowly in Turki as if seeking for words. "Sometimes I liked you, Hossein. But you promised—you would take me away where I would find my father. Now Dom Gion has done that, although I do not quite know how——"

"She knows not what she is saying," broke in Hossein. "Too much opium has been given her, Rawul Singh, yet not by me."

Assuring himself that Malcolm was giving orders to the perturbed *potail* for the actors to proceed, Hossein bent close to the Rajput and whispered—

"Rajput, would you look upon the man who slew your son?"

"Point him out, and name your reward."

"Come, then, but quietly. He hides within the castle, waiting to set hands on the revenue of the *feringhi*. Say naught to the *sahib*, for you know that he would but arrest the man and place him in a *feringhi* prison."

"It must wait."

There was perhaps no other inducement that would have appealed to Rawul Singh so strongly. But he would not leave his master.

As for Hossein, he shrugged, then cast a significant look at the thugs in the circle of spectators and loosened the long sash that was bound tightly around his waist. In the shadow of the castle wall he might have a chance to set upon the Rajput.

The Moslem youth was a skilled strangler, yet he desired the sound of music to stifle any possible outcry, for Rawul Singh was a big man and would not die quickly even if set upon from behind in the darkness.

It would be a notable achievement, thought Hossein, and would bring him fame among the thugs—fame and possession of

Tala. Dom Gion's craft had failed, Hossein meditated, and Tala had almost betrayed them.

He would risk being seen by the spectators, perhaps. But he was young and anxious to distinguish himself.

His deed would come at a fortunate moment for the thugs, for with Rawul Singh out of the way, Dom Gion might deal with the *feringhi* that night.

"YOU have done your share in entertainment," Malcolm assured the *potail* and the other merchants. "Now I will take part in the *tamasha.*"

"The *sahib* is kind."

Malcolm looked at the ring of faces around him and smiled. Many of these were his enemies and many were thugs; but he knew that they would not openly molest him—at least until he gave Dom Gion an opportunity to strike again.

And this he did not intend to do.

While the *potail* and his fellows watched, Malcolm told off three or four torch-bearers and placed them around the base of the tower. He then looked for Rawul Singh, and noticed that the Rajput was hanging back, glancing anxiously into the castle hall behind him. He was hoping to set eyes on the slayer of his son.

Then Malcolm called to the *potail* and the leading men of the village.

"Come with me," he commanded, "and bring a torch—there are snakes about, it seems."

The men hung back but Malcolm was imperious, his hard eyes threatening. As they approached he beckoned them into the castle. Choosing his way, the Scot went quickly to the foot of the stair leading to the tower. Rawul Singh followed the group, preferring to watch from the rear where he could see any weapon lifted against his master.

Malcolm took a risk in leaving the Bhir men at his back, but he had selected them with care—fat men and wealthy, consequently timid of their persons. The music outside clamored away as the *potail* had commanded and drowned their footfalls.

Hossein slipped behind Rawul Singh. "It's time we took the offensive," Malcolm thought, "after standing 'em off so long. Better for the morale of all concerned."

With that, nodding to the others to follow, he stepped on the stairs, running up swiftly. The final few feet he took in a bound and came out on the terrace top, pistol in hand.

Here he crouched, leveling his weapon.

"Stand up, Dom Gion," he cried to the figure that knelt against the parapet. "Or I fire. Come, come, I saw you watching me, and I'm rarely curious to see you, my friend, after this long time."

The merchants had not presumed to ascend the stairs, but presently they heard footsteps coming down toward them. By the glow of the torch they saw the thin figure of the half-caste, his yellow face pallid and his light eyes darting about him. One pace away was Malcolm, his pistol at the other's head.

"I have brought you," said the Scot to them sternly, "to witness the arrest of an evil-doer, by name Dom Gion, who has illegally claimed governorship of the district of Bhir."

The *potail* and the merchants gave back readily; in fact they made haste out of the castle corridor to the lights of the terrace. Dom Gion had built up an aura of fear about his presence—fear reinforced with threats—and it was perhaps the first time that they had seen him so clearly, face to face.

Moreover, not suspecting as Malcolm had done that the half-caste was in his favorite eyrie of the tower, there was something distinctly unnerving in the way Malcolm had, as it were, plucked his enemy out of the air.

Yet as the Scot and his prisoner moved into the light and the music ceased for the second time, many of the thugs among the spectators moved uneasily and felt for their strangling nooses and knives.

"Stand back!" ordered Malcolm, looking in vain for Rawul Singh.

Dom Gion glanced about eagerly, but the first figure he saw was that of Tala, staring at him hostilely, her eyes bright with anger.

"Is this the man who kept thee captive?" Malcolm asked her.

"Aye, *sahib.*"

At that fear came suddenly upon Dom Gion.

"Aid!" he shrieked. "Aid for the *jemadar.* Servants of Kali, strike down this man!"

He flung himself on the ground, crouching away from Malcolm's pistol, hope flashing into his twisted face as he realized that the other hesitated to shoot.

"Fools!" cried the half-caste. "Hossein—Oho, Hossein! It is the *jemadar* who calls——"

And then the watchers saw a strange thing. Rawul Singh stepped from the darkness of the castle. About his neck was bound a thug noose that dangled over his shoulders; his face was purple and blood came from his nostrils down over his beard.

In his arms Rawul Singh carried the limp body of Hossein.

"*Sahib,*" he groaned, throwing the body down, "the thug would have strangled me. Aye—almost he overcame me, until he exulted and cried in my ear that he who had killed the son would strangle the father."

The Rajput straightened, glaring at Dom Gion.

"*Sahib,* it gave me strength—that word. I ask pardon of thee for not keeping beside thee—it was a trick of our enemies."

Malcolm studied the throng of onlookers and saw that many were slipping away. Those who were not thugs prepared to depart as hastily as possible with dignity. The death of Hossein had taken away any desire that they might have had to fight. The followers of Dom Gion lingered, scowling and muttering.

"And I," said Malcolm quickly, "ask thy pardon, Rawul Singh. I suspected thee. Thou art a brave man—a very brave man." Turning on the thugs, he announced, "Dom Gion will be shot if the castle is not cleared within a moment."

The thugs were not open fighters. They looked at one another, and went away, hoping for another opportunity to strike at the white man.

That opportunity never came, for the next day brought Cunningham and his men.

It was not until after Cunningham and his sepoys had reached Bhir and taken the prisoner, Dom Gion, in charge—pending trial before law for the murders he had caused to be committed—that Tala could be prevailed upon to lead her father and Malcolm to the tank in the jungle where she had been kept captive and where Dom Gion had secreted his riches.

This hoard, Malcolm assured Cunningham, should be returned to those who proved themselves kin to the victims of the thugs.

The lease deeds and other concessions they burned. And Malcolm, after convincing himself that all active thugs had left Bhir, deposed the *potail* on grounds that the man had taken thug money.

This done, he resigned his office and said good-by to Cunningham, mounting immediately and riding away to his duties. For the ride out of the village, Malcolm was accompanied by Rawul Singh, who leaped from his horse and saluted the Scot standing, looking long and regretfully after the vanishing form of his superior officer.

Not until the dust of Malcolm's passage had settled down did Rawul Singh return to his hut and Tala.

Cunningham had rewarded the Rajput by appointing him *potail.*

Peace was established in Bhir. And for a while Rawul Singh enjoyed his new prestige and the favor of the *sahibs.* He asked Cunningham frequently about Malcolm, when making his reports, which were always very brief and concerned mainly with the summary punishment of Mussulmans.

In time, as the district continued law-abiding and prosperous, Rawul Singh became very restless, and his reports ceased entirely. He mounted his horse and rode to Agra to seek the Resident in person.

AND in the course of time Captain John Malcolm, then quartered in one of the hill stations of Kashmir, received a letter from the Resident which said among other things:

> It is just as well perhaps for the influence of the Government among the natives, my dear captain, that the Rajpoot, Rawul Singh has resigned his office as *potail.* I asked him for the reason that inspired his decision and he responded that Bhir was only fit to be administered by a trader or a woman, now that there was no fighting to be had.
>
> Rawul Singh then asked for your address, and, although I informed him that he is clearly beyond the age limit for our non-commissioned native officers, he insisted that he would ride to Kashmeer and that you would have a place for him near you.
>
> I fancy that almost any day you may see him ride in at your quarters with his daughter on the horse behind him and his luggage in his saddle-bags. I had not thought that he would leave the grave of his son—you are aware of the persistency of the natives in clinging to such customs—but, upon my word, he seems to have adopted you as his son.
>
> Y'r Ob't & Resp'tf'l Serv't,
> A. Cunningham.

The Camp-Fire
A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers & Adventurers

ANYBODY belongs to Camp-Fire who wishes to, but this comrade ought to have a seat well up toward the front:

New Orleans, Louisiana.

I was born in Denmark some thirty-odd years ago and have for the last eighteen years been knocking around Australia, New Zealand, South and North Africa, many of the South Sea Islands, North and South America, both on the east and west coast, and also the Far East from Cape Hope to Vladivostok. Been making my living as sailor, fireman, mate (once even master of a big square-rig ship; our master died at sea). Been a cabinet-maker, barber, structural iron-worker, gold and coal miner and have even had a fling at the making of the much-fought about beer. I've been shipwrecked twice and shot badly to pieces once (and the best of that was that I had nothing to do with the scrap at all).

Now if you think that I am good enough to sit around the Camp-Fire with the rest of the old-timers, then please send me a Camp-Fire button, and I am sure I will be proud of wearing it.—Eric C. M. Nielsen.

IT'S some time since our issue of July 18, 1920 but the details of the letter in question are not important. The main point made is that this particular brand of buried treasure seems particularly not worth looking for. The first of the following letters is from L. A. Cardwell, a numismatic comrade, to E. E. Harriman. Mr. Harriman felt—and I agree with him—that the matter in general was worth airing at our Camp-Fire and his say follows Mr. Cardwell's.

Las Cruces, New Mexico.

Was greatly interested in the extracts from newspaper clipping relative to Tumacacori treasure which you publish in Camp-Fire of July 18th, 1920. Whoever wrote the article may be all right as to the treasure, but he is certainly out of line as to historical facts.

LIKE youself, I do not believe that the hieroglyphics have any bearing whatever on the location of treasure. They are quite common throughout the Southwest and are to be found pecked or painted on boulders, cave walls or bluffs, wherever a favorable surface presented itself, alike near the dwellings of the sedentary peoples and the camp sites of the wandering tribes.

Authentic records state that Tumacacori was a former rancheria of one of the Pima tribes. Was visitat of Guevavi. In 1784 it became the mission of San José and was occupied as such until 1820 when the church, erected in 1752, was destroyed by the Apache.

THE location was selected no doubt as a strategic point for the conversion of different tribes and towns and not because of its nearness to "the ruins of one of the Seven Cities of Cibola" or to evidences of rich mineral deposits in the surrounding mountains.

Indian tradition is a poor basis for any fact. Why the Aztec would carry "2050 burro loads of white silver and 905 burro loads of gold and silver" all the hundreds of miles of rugged mountain and thirsty desert from the valley of Mexico to this particular locality, when so many equally good hiding-places were available nearer, is one of the details, like the treasure's exact location, which the tradition fails to explain.

"THE Seven Cities of Cibola" for which Coronado sought were not located in Arizona but have been definitely located by available records and authentic facts in southwestern Kansas. The Conquistadores found that the inhabitants of these "cities" like the other tribes throughout the Southwest, knew nothing of gold and silver, and the fabled wealth of Cibola was nothing more than the idle vaporings of Cabeza de Vaca. It was not Cabeza de Vaca, as the article states, who sought the seven cities, but it was his story of having visited them in his wanderings from the Florida coast which caused Coronado to look for them.

TRUE, there are many interesting ruins in the vicinity of Tucson, as in fact, throughout the entire Southwest. Among these may be mentioned Montezuma's castle and Montezuma's well, neither of which the great Aztec chieftain ever saw. These Arizona ruins, like the misnamed Gran Quivira ruins in New Mexico, are no more a part of the "Seven Cities of Cibola" than are the cities of Chicago and New York.

The Tubec ruins referred to so mysteriously in the article, were once a Spanish presidio with a garrison of fifty soldiers. In 1860 it was still occupied by Americans, Mexicans and Papagoes.

AS YOU know, there is hardly a locality throughout the Southwest which does not have its tradition of lost mines and buried treasure. The fact that numerous workings were hidden by the Indians after the uprising of 1670 has no doubt led to many of these stories, while there are others of more recent origin, like the "Lost Adams Diggings." Even the old abandoned border and Indian forts, occupied up to thirty or thirty-five years ago, by United States soldiers, have been delved into by treasure seekers. There has been much seeking but little finding.

Do you not think the treasure reported found by the Graham County puncher to have been more likely the loot of some modern bandit than to have been deposited by the Franciscans? It hardly seems possible that the shovel handle referred to in the report would have remained intact for 250 years, sticking from a tree in which decay had already started two and one-half centuries ago. In my opinion, if the treasure of Tumacacori ever existed, it still reposes in its original hiding place.—L. A. CARDWELL.

P. S.—Have never before heard of the Aztec god mentioned in the article and can find no mention of it in any book of reference. Will some one supply further information?—L. A. C.

Los Angeles, Calif.

For a good many years certain people in Spain have made a good fat thing out of preparing and selling to the credulous maps and detailed directions for finding buried treasure, hidden by padres and monks of ancient days. No man ever found anything through one of these maps nor ever will. It is a clear case of playing the old confidence or bunko game and has been shown up repeatedly.

ONE young man, in my study, showed me typewritten directions for finding treasure in eastern Arizona. One wrote to me not long ago, enclosing a clipping from an El Paso paper, which was an excerpt from a Denver paper, wherein some man tells a weird tale.

It told of the buried treasure of Gran Quivera, south of Albuquerque. A clairvoyant—a mysterious cañon—$75,000,000 in gold—cement walls and steps—an almost impassible mountain defile—huge cliffs to scale—a gold-piece that jumped into view on a rock—all figured in that veracious account. Here are incentives galore for research.

Consider. Two priests—sole survivors of 72—all the rest have been killed by Apaches—transporting 125 tons of gold into this place—a place where travel with a shoulder-pack is well nigh impossible.

They hide the gold—build cement walls and stairs—cover all traces and escape—to set other men to hunting the treasure.

IT WOULD take 1,600 burros to carry the gold, Apaches never let two lone men escape without trailing them. The burros would surely make some trail—the kind a blind man could follow. Whence came the cement? How was this gold packed or hoisted up the cliffs? If the priests brought it in from the desert side, why did not the Apaches trail and murder them, as they had the 70 others?

Another point—is there any sane man who can believe that if any group of monks or priests had hidden $75,000,000 in bullion, that the great Roman Catholic Church would not have had it unearthed long ago?

IN MY opinion the Gran Quivera treasure and a number of others, where priests and monks are named as the former custodians, are myths. I believe—and there is evidence secured by the federal authorities to prove it—that the maps and directions emanating from Spain are merely created in the laudable effort to make both ends meet.

In other words, some guy in old Spain has heard what Barnum said and so is harvesting American coin. Boys, lay off this stunt of being gulled. Keep your coin and tell Mr. Spaniard to go to and hang himself. You will find just as much gold under your own hearth as he can show you—perhaps more. I see by this morning's paper that a bunch have started out to find the Spanish galleon that was wrecked on the Texas coast — because some men found 25 skeletons. The owners of those skeletons may have traveled a hundred miles from the place of disaster, before giving out.

Or that galleon may be buried under the Gulf mud, where no power on earth can locate it. Anyhow, I am sure the bunch could earn more gold at day wages than they will find. But then, it is a good vacation stunt to hunt buried treasure and swinging a pick is fine for the shoulders.—E. E. HARRIMAN.

AT THE top of his letter was written "Kia Ora," so I knew he is probably Australian or New Zealander. But he was a bit hurried when he wrote the name of the Welsh town and Welsh proper names are nothing to hurry over—and nothing to guess at, so I'm heading his letter as from North Wales in general.

Here is the clipping he enclosed:

Advices from the western part of the United States report that the last has been seen of the wild-horse droves that used to be a feature of the "Wild West" life in America. It is asserted that there are no wild horses left.

I'd like to second his motion for information:

North Wales.

Re the enclosed which I cut out of a paper this morning, perhaps some of our Camp-Fire brothers could tell us some more about these wild horses. Probably some were in at the "death" if it is so.—WILLIAM J. COOPER.

FROM one of our own "old-timers" who began with our first issue and has done quite a number of interesting things besides:

New York.

This is my first letter to the Camp-Fire, although I have been a reader of this magazine since the first issue.

PERHAPS adventure appeals to me because I've run across a little myself since 1901. Went into Southern Mexico when 18 years old, to learn Spanish and get some real hunting. Always did love the rifle and revolver, and learned to shoot fast and straight. Hunted jaguars, wild pigs, mountain lions, deer, and rotodoras in Mexico for several years; then came back to U. S. A. Lived in the Southern States, but always answered the call of the tropics; went into Mexico at the time of the Madero revolution in 1910, but prefer not to refer to actions there, as I may again want to go to Mexico. Have traveled and hunted over a lot of territory in Central and South America, and occasionally had some pretty close shaves.

TOOK my first airplane ride when the industry was starting, in 1910 with Glenn Curtiss, and later in the same year with Johnny Moisant, who was killed in New Orleans in a hundred foot fall Dec. 31, 1910. Have ridden as passenger a number of times since, but the latest and best was a couple of weeks ago, clipping from *N. Y. Tribune* enclosed herewith.

Early part of 1917, before U. S. broke off diplomatic relations with Germany, I went on a semi-official confidential mission to Venezuela, spending several months in combating certain German influences, and the spice of adventure had plenty of seasoning there. During the World War my knowledge of Spanish, and certain countries particularly, was the cause of my being commissioned and sent to Cuba, Mexico, and other countries, but the interesting events of those trips are necessarily locked in the archives at Washington, and while some of them would make mighty interesting stories, it can't be done, at least over my name.

Am now engaged in building up a Foreign Trading business, which has already agencies or representatives in every country in the world; and among the interests, other than financial, is the opportunity which will be given me to visit and hunt, and perhaps see some new adventures, in the many localities I have not visited.

Wishing you all the success in the world,—J. I. MATHER, President Atlas Commerce Corporation.

Stations

IT IS quite a while since the Station idea was first presented to Camp-Fire and, beyond printing now and then the list of Stations already established and an outline of the idea, we in the office have done next to nothing toward pushing the plan. Which, I think, is the fairest and soundest way of testing it out. It seemed to me the kind of thing that quite a lot of you would respond to if we kept prodding and pushing you, but that would have been getting it into operation by pressure and forced draft, an artificial impetus. The only test really practical and worth while seemed to be to present it to Camp-Fire only enough to keep the idea fairly well before the eyes of all and then wait to see whether the idea had enough value and worth to make its way through natural appeal.

So we have followed the latter method and the results seem to prove strongly that the Station plan *is* inherently sound and meets with the kind of natural response that fully warrants taking it up in earnest. The number of Stations now in operation may seem very small in comparison to our total number and a strong indication in the negative, but to those of you who have been with us from the beginning it will be wholly encouraging. You will remember how "Ask Adventure," "Lost Trails," our identification cards, mail service, buttons, even our Camp-Fire itself seemed to lag and totter along when they were first tried out. Starting a new thing is always slow work and we must judge the new baby by comparison with our grown-ups when *they* were babies. On this basis I have no doubts of the success of the Station idea and I think most of our old-timers will agree with me.

ALSO, remember that in the nature of things there could not possibly be so many members who would or could start Stations as there are members who would want cards or buttons or write letters to Camp-Fire or even send inquiries to "Lost Trails."

Most of all, the Station idea calls for many men who would use the Stations, but only a few to run the Stations. One volunteer for the latter work means a large number who are interested from the point of view of users.

The more we in the office think about it, the surer we are that the Stations have come to stay. So we are going to settle down to the job as one more permanent practical service that can, with Camp-Fire's help, be kept going for the benefit of Camp-Fire. And I fully believe that, as time goes on, our Camp-Fire Stations will become something of which all of us will feel very proud. There are tremendous possibilities in the plan and I believe that before we are through we are going to realize them.

ONE fundamental point can not be too much emphasized. To the extent that these Stations are used to advertise our magazine or anything else their success will be limited and made doubtful. Therefore we must keep advertising or propaganda work clear away from them. I realize fully that their very existence helps the magazine and advertises it. So do our Id. cards, our "Lost Trails," our Camp-Fire itself. But, like them, it is a useful and welcomed service, is for that reason justified, and will, if kept as free from direct advertising as they have been, suffer in no way from the secondary fact that it helps the magazine.

I know that you are perfectly willing to boost the magazine, that many of you miss no opportunity of doing so, and I am grateful to you for every single boost. But boosting is something that should be left to each man's inclination and judgment, not in any way forced upon him through the Stations, Id. cards or anything else started or fostered by us here in the office, and of course you agree with me on this point.

Well, so far as I can see, we have eliminated from the Station plan every possible factor advertising the magazine. Nowhere in connection with a Station does the name of our magazine or of Camp-Fire appear. The sign displayed is merely the Camp-Fire button enlarged, and on the button we had already eliminated the advertising feature by using the figure "71" instead of the word "Camp-Fire." The signs thus far sent out have carried the word "Adventure" in rather small type at the bottom, but we are cutting this word off the remaining signs and are asking the Keepers who have already received signs to remove this word.

There is the fact that a Station maintained in a store or other place where commodities are bought and sold serves to advertise that place and to help sell its commodities, but I think nobody will object to that small advantage accruing to any member of Camp-Fire who offers the rest of us the advantage of a Station on his premises.

A SECOND big point is that the only things *required* of a Station are that it shall display the sign so that the Station can be recognized as such, keep a register for Camp-Fire visitors, and, without any responsibility therefor, hold or forward mail at sender's risk and cost. (Signs and registers furnished free by this magazine.) Those are very light duties, and the general responsibilities are only such undefined ones as any decent member of Camp-Fire will feel toward the rest of us. The keeper binds himself to only the above duties, to surrendering signs, on demand, to this magazine as its property and to making no use, without its permission, of anything serving to connect Stations, Camp-Fire or this magazine with anything not authorized by us.

This, of course, does not limit what a keeper may offer. He is more than free to offer hospitality and the friendly hand to any extent he pleases. But the point is that in each case the keeper himself is the sole judge and final arbiter as to whether his Station shall offer anything beyond the bare duties required and, if he so pleases, may change his custom in these matters to suit each particular case that comes up. We can furnish printed cards to put up in Stations, listing various possible services, the keeper striking out any he does not wish to offer. Also copies of the general list of Stations.

THIRD, who has a right to use a Station? Any member of Camp-Fire, as things stand now. And any one is a member of Camp-Fire who is sufficiently congenial to its spirit to wish to belong. This, to me, seems the right basis, but it can be changed if experience shows the need, by any process that seems fair to you—a vote open to all Camp-Fire members, a vote by Keepers, or by both with a Keeper's vote counting more than that of an ordinary member.

It has been suggested by some of you that no one be permitted to use a Station unless he has a Camp-Fire button or carries one of our Id. cards. I can not see that this would be much protection against undesirables and I think it would be a bad thing thus to compel some members to get a card or button. Cardboard cards are given free, on buttons we make a negligible profit over manufacturing cost (probably a loss if handling, etc., are considered), metal cards we sell a mite below manufacturer's price to us. Nevertheless I do not like the principle of forcing any one into getting them.

The user of a Station has a *right* to only two things—to register in the Station book, using what the Keeper may consider reasonable space for his name and other data, and to use the mail service as outlined above. *That is all.* For the rest, he is in another man's house and it is altogether up to that other man whether the user shall be made a guest and to what extent.

My personal experience with Camp-Fire members (and I've met a lot of you) has been that most of you are men and few of you sponges or parasites, but it might be well to add that a Keeper is not supposed to be a bank or an organized charity.

SO MUCH for the "have to" of a Keeper. On the other hand, using his own judgment and following his own inclinations, he has opportunity to get for himself some mighty pleasant acquaintances and some mighty good times, as I know from personal experience. You see, I've been running an informal Station here at the office for quite a few years, so I'm not just theorizing about what happens to a man who has an open door for wandering Camp-Fire members.

A Station's advantages to the user are obvious. If he does not know that district, its trails and ways, here is a chance to find out. If he is lonely in a strange place, here is opportunity to meet a congenial spirit and, through him, possibly others, gaining their friendship according to his own merit. Those of you who wander most will most appreciate the hundreds of ways in which a Station's introduction can be of service.

LAST, do not forget the big possibilities of Stations as gathering-places. Each one can become a little Camp-Fire in itself, a local center for all whose tastes run along our lines, an informal meeting-place where you can swap yarns, sometimes with wanderers fresh from far places, a nucleus for whatever local organization you may care to build up. Think this part of it over carefully. Don't try to force anything. Let matters shape themselves, but be on the lookout for the right time and the right way to crystallize things into a local organization that will bring its members as much rare enjoyment as the Adventurers' Clubs in New York and Chicago have for years brought to their members.

Such local organizations would be no more tied to this magazine than are the Stations—less, in fact, for not even register and sign need connect them. Each club would be entire master of its own course, uniting with others in a general organization only if it wished to. Like the New York Adventurers' Club, it could meet only for monthly dinners. Or have the Station or other place for a meeting-place with no regular time for meetings. Or follow any other of a hundred plans. But, for really good times, as little formality and red-tape as possible.

SO MUCH for a general survey. We in the office are getting down on the job. Cox will be in special charge of our end of the Station work, just as Noyes, Barretto and I are in charge of our end of "A. A.", "Lost Trails" and "Camp-Fire" respectively. Go right to headquarters in all matters pertaining to Stations and address J. E. Cox, who is going to be the clearinghouse for all of us. If you want to ask further questions, fire them at him; if you want a sign and register to start a Station, let him know. Most of all, if you have any suggestions or advice, send them in.

If you are so situated that you can, do your part and start a Station. Particularly if you live off the beaten trail. Let's get our Stations scattered all over the world. There is no reason why we can't.

In next issue we'll have some of the letters from those who are already keepers of Stations and from others interested in the idea. Following is a list of Stations already in operation, with some further data:

CANADA—Vancouver, B. C. C. Plowden, B. C. Drafting & Blue Print Co.
Burlington, Ontario. Thos. Jocelyn.
Dunedin, P. E. Island. J. N. Berrigan.
The Post Weekly, Deseronto. Harry M. Moore.
Norwood, Manitoba. Albert Whyte, 172½ De Meurons St.
Montreal, P. Q. Nelson J. Cook, 2037 St. Catharine St., E.
Winnipeg, Man. Walter Peterson, 143 Kennedy Street.

CALIFORNIA—Oakland. Lewis F. Wilson, 2963 Linden St.
Lost Hills. Mr. and Mrs. M. A. Monson, care of Gen. Pet. No. 2.
San Bernardino. Mrs. R. Souter, 275 K St.
Los Angeles. Colonel Wm. Strover, Westlake Military School, Mount Washington.

CANAL ZONE—Cristobal. F. E. Stevens.

COLORADO—Denver. Elwood Claughton, 1234 Elati Street.

CUBA—Havana. B. N. Farles, Dominquer 7 Cerro.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA—Washington. Fagan's Cigar Store, 1404 New York Ave., N. W.

HONDURAS, C. A. Dr. Wm. C. Robertson, Galeras, Olancho.

INDIANA—Connersville. Norba Wm. Guerin, 112 East 18 St.

ILLINOIS—Chicago. John Bradford Main, care of The Junior Yanks, 144 S. Wabash Ave.

LOUISIANA—New Orleans. W. A. Bussey, St. Louis Café, Dauphine and St. Louis Sts.

MAINE—Bangor. Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 70 Main St.

MASSACHUSETTS—Malden. Arthur R. Lloyd, 16 Cross St.

MICHIGAN—Marquetta. T. Mitchell, Box 864, G. P. O.

NEW JERSEY—Caldwell. Chas. A. Gerlard, P. O. Box 13.
Bayonne. J. D. Gray, 92 West Sixth St.

NEW YORK—N. Y. C. Robt. V. Steel, care of American Legion, 19 West 44 St.
Jamestown. W. E. Jones, 906 Jefferson St.
Yonkers. A. F. Whegan, 173 Elm St.
Bronx. St. Mary's Men's Club, 142 Alexander Ave.

OHIO—East Akron. Harry J. Lang, 137 South Arlington St.

OREGON—Marshfield. F. J. Webb, 200 Market Ave.
Salem. D. Wiggins.

PENNSYLVANIA—Philadelphia. Wm. A. Fulmer, 252 S. Ninth St.
Philadelphia. Alfred A. Krombach, 4159 N. Eighth Street.

SOUTH CAROLINA—Allendale. Ed. N. Clark, Editor-Owner *The Tri-County Record* and Allendale *Advance.*

TEXAS—Wichita Falls. A. M. Barlow, P. O. Box 51.

WASHINGTON—Republic. A. E. Beaumont, Box 283.
Ione. A. S. Albert, Albert's Billiard Hall.
Seattle, H. C. Copeland, *The Western Sportsman*, 83 Columbia St.
Burlington. Carson, Ed. L.

WISCONSIN—Madison. Frank Weston, Room 9, Tenny Bldg.
Milwaukee. Paul A. Buerger, Apt. 2, 150 Biddle Street.

A Station may be in any shop, home or other reputable place. The only requirements are that a Station shall display the regular Station sign, provide a box or drawer for mail to be called for and provide and preserve the register book.

No responsibility for mail is assumed by anybody; the Station merely uses ordinary care. Entries in register to be confined to name or serial number, route, destination, permanent address and such other brief notes or remarks as desired; each Station can impose its own limit on space to be used. Registers become permanent property of Station; signs remain property of this magazine, so that if there is due cause of complaint from members a Station can be discontinued by withdrawing sign.

A STATION bulletin-board is strongly to be recommended as almost necessary. On it travelers can leave tips as to conditions of trails, etc., resident members can post their names and addresses, such hospitality as they care to offer, calls for any travelers who are familiar with countries these residents once knew, calls for particular men if they happen that way, etc., notices or tips about local facilities and conditions. Letters to resident members can be posted on this bulletin-board.

Any one who wishes is a member of Camp-Fire and therefore entitled to the above Station privileges. Those offering hospitality of any kind do so on their own responsibility and at their own risk and can therefore make any discriminations they see fit. Traveling members will naturally be expected to remember that they are merely guests and act accordingly.

A Station may offer only the required register and mail facilities or enlarge its scope to any degree it pleases. Its possibilities as headquarters for a local club of resident Camp-Fire members are excellent.

The only connection between a Station and this magazine is that stated above and a keeper is in no other way responsible to this magazine nor representative of it.

WHERE is our old comrade M. Logie? Haven't heard from or of him for a year or so. The World War was just another chapter to him and, when I lost touch with him, he was hunting hard for Chapter Next. If he sees this, I hope he'll report.

IT'S been some little time since we've had a report on queer places where copies of our magazine have been found. The story Comrade Frazier refers to is "The Soul of a Regiment," which most of you will remember and which we reprinted because of the demand for it.

Conway, Pennsylvania.

I found an *Adventure* magazine in a joint of bamboo in an extinct volcano at Holo. Also another in a carrabao stall, which was about half eaten up. The one I found in the bamboo had the story of the soldier by Talbot Mundy that you printed twice.—HAMPTON J. FRAZIER.

YES, it's a long letter, but most of us like a fellow who's strong for his own—and that is not necessarily the same as a swelled head by quite a lot. I'll say that this comrade is strong for Texas. Now me, I'm from Ohio and Ohio is the—all right I'll stop. We can't all of us cut loose about our native State or whatever it was we started in. If we did, Camp-Fire would break up in its first riot. Here's to Texas!

Morgan City, Louisiana.

The Camp-Fire, Gentlemen: Have you room for a newcomer to edge in and make a few random remarks in Camp-Fire? I use the term "newcomer" with reservations. I have never contributed to the columns of Camp-Fire, but for several years I have been a constant reader.

PERHAPS, before you will admit me, I had better tell you who I am. One August morning, quite a few years ago, I let out my first yell out in the little town of Llano, in the central mineral region of Texas. And then for nineteen years I spent my life on ranches and around the granite quarries of that section, attending public school only when my parents became unduly insistent. Came my graduation from high school, followed by a course in the University of Texas at Austin. While in college chance caused me to select my life work, a work that was destined to lead me forth from my native State and make me a wanderer in this broad country of ours. In college I wrote up the sports for one of the Austin newspapers and my work evidently pleased them, for when I had completed my course I was offered a position on the editorial staff. Having nothing else in view, I accepted. That day I became a wanderer, for where is the real newspaper reporter or writer who is not a drifter, a roamer upon the face of the earth?

I HAVE hewed to the line since that day I first became a reporter, and although I have occasionally taken up other lines of endeavor I have invariably returned to the newspaper game. There is no getting away from it. I have traveled quite a bit, but I have gone upon the idea of seeing America first and have not visited many foreign countries. I am not an old man, however, and in time I hope to see them all. I have played the game in San Antonio, Dallas, El Paso and other Texas cities. I have worked on papers in Oklahoma, out in Washington (the State), down in Florida, in Tennessee, in several of the Great Lakes States, and over in Virginia. I have plied the profession in its many phases in several Canadian cities, and I have been a war correspondent in Mexico. Cuba, Guatemala and Salvador are the only other foreign countries I have visited.

THEN there came that time when Germany's last kaiser decided he wanted to take Christmas dinner in Paris. Like millions of my countrymen I did not want to see Wilhelm attain his desire. I gave up a newspaper position to volunteer, May 14, 1917. Here my inherited love of horse and saddle prompted me and I enlisted in the cavalry. I had visions of being sent to Europe and enjoying some new experiences. Those who ranked me had other visions. After serving a hitch with the 11th and the 22nd Cavalry I was assigned to a machine-gun school and on completion of my course was commissioned and made an instructor in a replacement camp. There I stayed until Hindenberg was knocked out, instructing other soldiers to go over to France and do that which I had hoped to do myself. Following my discharge I entered the trade journal field, my work causing me to visit every important fishing center on the Gulf of Mexico and the South Atlantic. And now I am down here in Louisiana managing a club woman's magazine. How some of my newspaper friends of the early days would rave if they knew that I was playing this branch of the game down here!

NOW that I have that out of my system, let me get down to the chief reason for this letter. With much interest I read the letter from Andrew MacCrum in the issue of June 3rd, 1920. I am in thorough accord with Mr. MacCrum's views as expressed in that letter, bar one. When I differ with him in this one matter it is with thorough appreciation of his knowledge of the United States. But I, too, know the States, having visited them all except Maine and New Hampshire, and I speak with the knowledge gained by visiting the various States and living among their people.

Mr. MacCrum says that he believes that the States of Kentucky, Virginia and California have the most distinct personalities. No Texan will admit that any other State is more distinct than the big Lone Star domain.

IT SEEMS to me that a native of no other State is as proud, as boastful, if you will, of his State as a Longhorn is of Texas. This is in keeping with his history. Virginia and Massachusetts and the other thirteen colonies have wonderful histories, granted. But the fact remains that Texas is the only one which fought and gained its own independence, had its separate history as a nation, and then came into the Union of its own free will and accord. Pages of Texas history are filled with the deeds of Stephen Austin, Sam Houston, Davy Crockett, Ben Milam, Deaf Smith, James Bowie, James Bonham, William Travis, Col. Fannin, Edward Burleson and others who made the Lone Star flag possible. The gamest fight in the history of the world, according to one historian, was fought at San Antonio. "Thermopylae had its messenger of defeat, but the Alamo had none." After the Alamo came the Battle of Goliad and minor engagements, followed by the Battle of San Jacinto, when Sam Houston and his Texans burnt their bridges behind them and, with retreat impossible, entered the fray with the battle cry, "Remember the Alamo! Remember Goliad!" Santa Anna, self-styled "Napoleon of the West," was captured and Texan independence was won. To-day a Mexican will tell you that Mexico can whip the United States if Texas will stay out of the fight.

MANY people look upon Texas as a new State. Commercially it is. But it has been quite a few years since La Salle and his Frenchmen first landed in Texas. San Augustine, Florida, may be the oldest city in the United States, but the little town of Ysleta, Texas, out near El Paso, claims this honor and has good proofs to back up its claims.

I find that a Texan is always a Texan. My observations are that a longhorn will boast more of his State than the natives of any other. I saw this emphasized in the Army, where men from all sections of the country were brought together. Now and then you would see a man from some other State who would show his pride and love for his State, but whenever you saw a Texan you would see a man who breathed and lived and dreamed Texas. They were more clannish than the men from other States. Let a Texan get into trouble and other Texans were there to back him up. Let a man make a remark disparaging to Texas and his hand would invariably be called, and sometimes be called hard. They were just Texans and there was no getting away from it.

THERE are the Texas Rangers, distinctive of the State. Almost single-handed they cleaned up Texas and made one of the most law-abiding States out of one of the most lawless. Mexicans fear them more to-day than they do the United States Army. Theodore Roosevelt said of Capt. McDonald, of the Rangers, "He would fight —— with a bucket of water." The story is told of a riot taking place in one Texas town. The mayor wired the governor to send a company of Rangers. One Ranger was sent. When he stepped off the train the committee which met him said, in disappointment, "Are you the only one who came?" The Ranger replied, "There's only one riot, ain't there?"

I THINK Mr. MacCrum's suggestion that the West starts anywhere five miles beyond the limits of the larger cities, "Where men's hearts grow a little kinder," is about the best answer to the question, "Where does the West begin?" The West, as told of in song and story, and as pictured in the moving pictures of to-day, is a thing of history. Modern influences have destroyed the old, picturesque, romantic West. With the passing of Geronimo and the conquering of the Indians; with the breaking up of the large ranches, and the coming of the farmer and the nester; with the death of John Barleycorn and the passing of the dance-hall; with the enforcement of the law and the curbing of the lawless; with the passing of the mustang and the bronco, and the coming of the auto and the airplane; with modern inventions and progress the old West has passed into history.

If you have lived through the foregoing let me thank you for your perseverance. I realize that this, my first attempt to gain admittance to Camp-Fire, is rather lengthy but if you can find room for me I will be gratified.—A. D. DALRYMPLE.

CONCERNING his novelette in this issue, a few words from Harold Lamb:

Ghost-ridden communities in India were not at all the stuff that dreams are made of. Especially in the earliest years of the nineteenth century. They were a stubborn fact, owing largely to the circumstance that the people of the district not only believed in the ghost, but accepted it as part of their general family.

There was scarcely a community, of course, without its particular spirits, but not every village had its ghost-proprietor.

In the latter case, every care was taken to make out all deeds in the name of the ghost; or, if a new proprietor took over the district, his name was often written down as agent of the ghost. A Moslem landholder once neglected to acknowledge his spectral co-partner, and perished of snake-bite.

REPORTS of British Commissioners record the death of an English magistrate who readjusted the boundaries established by a dead proprietor. In this case it was sickness, but every native of the village, when questioned, affirmed that the spirit-proprietor was responsible.

One district in Oudh was extremely fertile, but its lands lay fallow because no *jagirdar* was willing to supplant the claims of its dead owner. It proved difficult for Europeans to put such lands under tillage again.

It only remains to be said that in case of a Ghond (mountaineer outcaste) or thug proprietor, the spirit of the deceased was presumed to be more active than usual.

DRAWING letters almost at random from our Camp-Fire cache furnishes the element of surprize but also that of delay. Here is one written in March, 1920, which I wish I had given you earlier:

Los Angeles, California.

Tobey Riddle, heroine of the Modoc war, died February seventeenth of influenza on the Klamath Indian reservation. She was close to ninety years of age.

I have just received from her son, Jeff C. Riddle, a good friend of mine, the following facts in regard to his mother's death.

"MY MOTHER, Tobey Riddle, died while on a visit to her sister. She was taken ill on February eighth, while I was ill with influenza myself in Klamath Falls, but I left my sick bed and hastened to her side. She was very low, but she knew me. I did all I could to prolong her life, but in vain. Her last words to me where these:

" 'My son, I see my time is drawing to an end. I am ready to answer the last great call. I am happy to say that I have lived a good life and a helpful life to others. I am not going to tell you what you must do in the future, for I am proud of you, son, even in my last moments on earth. You will do the right thing, as you have lived. I am also proud of my grandchildren and great-grandchildren, so my last wishes are for you to take care of them and guard them against evil!"

What nobler words of Christian devotion and love could be uttered by any mother of any race or color?

Tobey Riddle's life was devoted to helping others. Ever since the great Modoc uprising in 1873, when Captain Jack's band took to the warpath because they were driven from pillar to post, robbed of their lands where they and their ancestors had always lived and their rights disregarded—ever since that time, Tobey Riddle's life had been devoted to leading her people in the strait and narrow way. For years she acted as a teacher and missionary, and was the means of pointing her people to the road of civilization and showing them the necessity of adopting the customs of the pale-faces.

IT WOULD seem that the State of Oregon ought to recognize in Tobey Riddle a heroine who should be as well known in American history as Pocahontas or Sacajawea. In spite of the fact that Tobey Riddle jeopardized her own life as well as that of her husband, Frank Riddle, at the massacre of the Peace Commissioners, April 11, 1873, where she saved the life of Col. A. B. Meacham by fighting off two Modoc braves, one of whom had shot and the other had started to scalp Meacham, it was not until seventeen years after the Modoc war that Congress granted to this noble Indian woman the slight pittance of twenty-five dollars per month which she received until her death, although it seems niggardly indeed that her services to her country were not recognized at the time her valorous deed was performed.

A monument to her memory would be a fitting memorial for the State of Oregon to erect over her burial spot. Let us give this devoted Indian woman a monument befitting her services to her own race and the whites.—E. A. BRININSTOOL.

IN SPITE of trying not to bust out with it at Camp-Fire, once in a while I have to speak out about what is always pretty close to my heart. Our country's problems are up to us, the individual citizens, because her weaknesses and troubles are very largely of our own making. Until we, the individual citizens, take hold and do our full part our country will only go from one trouble to another.

It happens I've never read much of Walt Whitman. I guess I've missed something big. Looks to me as if he *were* America—her voice and spirit. Last night I read the manuscript of a story, a fiction-history of Whitman, that may some day be a much-talked-of book. It is not the type of story for our magazine and I'll not talk further of it here, but the following lines seized upon my attention, quoted from Whitman:

O I see now, flashing, that this America is only you and me,
Its power, weapons, testimony, are you and me,
Its crimes, lies, thefts, defections, slavery, are you and me,
Its Congress is you and me.

Isn't it exactly the same idea? And isn't it true? And worth thinking about?—**A. S. H.**

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

THESE services of *Adventure* are free to *any one.* They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules,* thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure,* New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you, *post-paid,* the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange,* 109 *Mountfort St., Boston, Mass., can supply* Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.

WILL SELL: Nov., Dec., 1910. Jan. to Nov., inclusive, 1911. Jan., Feb., April, June, July, Aug., Sept., Nov., Dec., 1913. All 1914. All 1915 except Oct. All 1916. All 1917. First and Mid-Jan., First and Mid-Feb., First and Mid-March, First and Mid-April, First and Mid-May, First and Mid-July, First Aug., First and Mid-Sept., First Nov., First Dec., 1918. All 1920. Fifteen cents each if sold in one lot; twenty-five cents each if sold in small lots, postage collect.—Address J. D. TUNNELL, Box 32, Reger, Mo.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of this issue.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *unstamped* envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 519 Citizens Bldg., Cleveland, Ohio.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure.")

Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for Ask Adventure, but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. Ask Adventure covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

2. The Sea Part 1
BERIAH BROWN, Seattle Press Club, 1209 Fifth Ave., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. ★ The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire should be sent to] Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodcraft; furs, freshwater pearls, herbs; and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Orlando, Florida. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Middle Western U. S. Part 1
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. Early history of Missouri Valley.

8. Middle Western U. S. Part 2
JOHN B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big timber sections.

9. Middle Western U. S. Part 3
LARRY ST. JOHN, Melbourne Beach, Fla. Covering Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Lake Michigan. Fishing, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, clamming, early history, legends.

10. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

11. Western U. S. Part 2 and Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, and the border States of old Mexico; Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

12. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C. R. MAHAFFEY, Lista de Correos, Mazatlan, Sinaloa, Mexico. Covering Lower California and that part of Mexico lying south of a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, commerce, business and general conditions.

★(Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents in stamps NOT attached)
Return postage not required from U. S. or Canadian soldiers, sailors or marines in service outside the U. S., its possessions, or Canada.

13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 1
S. E. Sangster ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 2
Harry M. Moore, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Covering southeastern Ontario and the Ottawa Valley. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation.

15. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 3
George L. Catton, Tweed, Ont., Canada. Covering Southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

16. North American Snow Countries Part 4
T. F. Phillips, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minnesota. Covering Hunters Island and English River district. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel. *The shortest, quickest and cheapest way to get into this north country.*

17. North American Snow Countries Part 5
Ed. L. Carson, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

18. North American Snow Countries Part 6
Theodore S. Solomons, Carmel, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

19. North American Snow Countries Part 7
Reece H. Hague, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Covering Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel.

20. North American Snow Countries Part 8
Jas. F. B. Belford, Codrington, Ont., Canada. Covering New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and southeastern Quebec. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper and wood-pulp industries, land grants, water-power.

21. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. Halton, 632 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

22. Central America
Edgar Young, care *Adventure* magazine, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

23. South America Part 1
Edgar Young, care *Adventure* magazine, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile; geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

24. South America Part 2
P. H. Goldsmith, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Covering Venezuela, the Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

25. Asia, Southern
Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

(Note: Gordon MacCreagh, the editor of this section, is on an exploration trip, and owing to our inability to obtain a suitable substitute this section is suspended during his absence.)

26. Philippine Islands
Buck Connor, 1555 Wilcox Ave., Hollywood, Calif, Covering history, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, exports and imports, manufacturing.

27. Japan
Grace P. T. Knudson, Castine, Maine. Covering Japan; commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

28. Russia and Eastern Siberia
Major A. M. Lochwitzky (formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Austin, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalien; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

29. Africa Part 1
Thomas S. Miller, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

30. Africa Part 2
George E. Holt, Frederick, Md. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

31. ★ Africa Part 3. Portuguese East Africa
R. W. Waring, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

32. ★ Africa Part 4. Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo
Charles Beadle, Ile de Lerne, par Vannes, Morbihan, Brittany, France. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

33. Africa Part 5. Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand
Captain F. J. Franklin, 40 South Clark Street, Chicago, Illinois. Climatic conditions, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, mines and minerals, opportunities for employment, direct shipping routes from United States of America, general information covering living conditions, travel and opportunities.

34. ★ New Zealand and the South Sea Islands
Tom L. Mills, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen. (*Postage 8 cents.*)

35. South Sea Islands of French Oceania
Charles Brown, Jr., 213 E Street, San Rafael, California. Covering Tahiti and the Society Islands, the Paumotu or Pearl Islands, and the Marquesas. Geography, natives, history, language, customs, travel, equipment, climate, produce, trading, pearl-diving, living conditions and expenses; sports, vanilla and coconut culture.

36. ★ Australia and Tasmania
Albert Goldie, Hotel Sydney, Sydney, Australia. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

FIREARMS, PAST AND PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers and ammunition. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the Ask Adventure editor covering the district in question.)

A.—All Shotguns (including foreign and American makes). J. B. Thompson, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers (including foreign and American makes). D. Wiggins, Salem, Ore.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. Thompson, 906 Pontiac Bldg, Chicago., Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; live bait; camping outfits; fishing trips.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union may be called upon for general information relating to Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Commission, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★*(Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents—in Mr. Mills' case 8 cents— in stamps NOT attached)*

Mr. Moore Is in the Clear

HE WROTE the item and we wrote the heading. And it was the heading that raised the ruckus. So Mr. Moore is in the clear and always has been. We apologize all round. The subjoined letter tells the whole story:

Dear Chief:—

I'm in a mull of a hess over the letter published in Ask Adventure of the First March issue under the caption "Don't Homestead in Ontario." Now, I am of the opinion that the heading is my undoing—Ontario is a very, very large province and some of my friends in the North have reared up. Truth to tell, there are millions of acres in the clay belt up near where Farrell and Hinton and Kloor landed with their balloon.

Of course, insofar as my district is concerned I have told the truth, but probably I put the thing in such a way that the Northerners have a chance to get after my hide. Such a thing would probably never happen again in a thousand years, but this time Ask Adventure will be doing me a favor, as well as a favor to the North, to put the thing right.

There are millions of acres available for homesteads in the clay belt, but I would not advise any *white* man to try his luck in the back parts of the district I cover—just as I said in my published letter. I take it that I am here to tell the truth.

Butterflies of Panama

IT'S hard to believe that they've been so thick as to hold up railroad building; yet it would appear to be even so:

Question:—"I am writing to ask you for information in regard to the flora and fauna of Panama. I am going to Panama this Spring and wish very much to get a book to take with me that will give information, especially in regard to the butterflies of the Canal Zone. Do you know of any such book or books? I have applied at the libraries and can get nothing on that particular subject."—Alice F. Peterson, Santa Ana, Calif.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—1. To get a full idea of the general flora and fauna of the Republic of Panama a look at the Encyclopedia Britannica under the heading of *Colombia*, *Costa Rica*, and *Panama*, and subheads of flora and fauna will give you a general knowledge of flora and fauna of Panama. With few exceptions the flora and fauna of all three countries are similar, and what has been overlooked in one is present in the other.

Also get booklet "Panama" from Pan-American Union, Washington, D. C. Would also suggest dropping a line to this society for suggestions concerning natural-history data along the lines you specify.

2. To my knowledge there is no book dealing solely with the butterflies of Panama. I have in my possession a book that was sent me for review by Macmillan Company entitled "A Year of Costa Rican Natural History," by Mr. and Mrs. A. S. and P. P. Calvert, published 1917. Their main object was to study the dragon-flies of Costa Rica, but their work (541 printed pages) contains reference to most of the other insect life, all or most of which will be useful for one studying insect life on the Canal Zone.

3. Butterflies are extremely numerous on the Zone. I don't know just what effect the artificial lake has had upon them, but formerly they were so numerous at certain seasons that men out surveying near Tiger Hill at Black Swamp on the old line of the P. R. R. were unable to see their rodmen for hours at a stretch due to the incessant swarm of butterflies migrating by, usually from one given direction to another. This is a fact that I witnessed with my own eyes.

Also I know that they range from tiny little fellows to immense bat like creatures. I would hesitate to state the dimensions of some of the largest.

4. Also I suggest that you get a copy of the oldest and best natural history of all Central America, written years ago, and still referred to with reverence by all biologists. This is "A Naturalist in Nicaragua," by Thomas Belt; it specializes on ants.

'Most any book that contains data concerning Central America can be obtained either through the Pan-American Union, Washington, D. C., or through the *South American Magazine*, Book Department, Lexington Ave., New York City.

Also I will add that if any work dealing with butterflies of Panama has ever been printed it will have been referred to in the book reviews of the *Pan-American Bulletin*, official magazine of the Pan-American Union. And it might be possible that they have printed articles covering this subject. If they have you will be able to get the copy of magazine from them or from Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D. C.

Drifting through Nigeria

JUDGING from the tenor of Mr. Miller's reply to this inquirer, the African West Coast is not ideal territory to visit on a shoe-string:

Question:—"I would like information on the following subjects and questions:

1. What kind of outfit would two people need in North Nigeria district and in district from Delta to Jebba?
2. What would it probably cost to get to West Coast from New York?
3. How is work?
4. How are expenses?
5. How is canoeing?
6. How are the trails and trade?"—James Q. Graham, Fort Douglas, Utah.

Answer, by Mr. Miller:—1. *Outfit.*—Take the outfit of a U. S. A. soldier in the Philippines and you would about cover every contingency. One need not go to any great outfitting expense. In fact, I would pick up a couple of canvas Army suits, puttees, light-weight boots, pair of canvas shoes and light underwear and cotton shirts, but not more than I had on hand of the latter, as one can buy on the coasts cheaper than in U. S. A.

Some men would take a tent. But if I were canoeing up the Niger I would trust to an upturned canoe for cover and to the hospitality of the blacks.

Anyway one only wants cover in the rainy season—February to April.

2. *Costs of passage.*—Rates have changed considerably since the war, but first-class from New York to West Africa would be about two hundred dollars, second a hundred and twenty. Write to the shipping agents, Daniel Bacon, 26 Beaver St., New York; James W. Elwell & Co., 17 State St., New York. An ex-service man ought to be able to work a passage, especially as the U. S. A. Shipping Board run steamers from New York to West Africa.

3. *Work.*—The prospects of getting work on the Niger are very scant, though a likable fellow would not go hungry. For the sake of white man's prestige over the blacks the authorities would see that no white was forced to bum off African charity; and for that matter the trading-companies might find a job for the right fellow. But you take long chances.

4. *Expenses.*—This depends on yourself, on your hardness, how much you have learned to do without, whether you can get along on native "chop," reduce your wants to primitive simplicity. If you can do that you could get by on as low as forty dollars a month for the two of you, if you paddled your own canoe.

5. *Canoeing.*—I never saw a white in Nigeria paddling a canoe. In the tropics white men take it easy. The canoes are heavy, cumbersome dugouts, but on the placid waters of the Niger, free of rapids for over a thousand miles from the delta, its current never much more than four miles an hour, one could ship a light canoe, or if you are handy at canoe-making, take the tools and build your own, though I should prefer a skiff with oars, one large enough to pack one's supplies for six months.

You could leisure along, taking your own time, and taking in side trips up the Niger's tributaries, with friendly natives along the banks, and hitting every day or so a "factory"—a trading-station—where you would be hospitably welcomed unless you got yourself in bad at first going.

6. *Trails and Trade.*—I can not go into detail of the many trade-trails, caravan-routes, government roads, as that would practically entail a geographical description of a country larger than California and New Mexico; nor can I go into the labyrinths of barter, but suggest that you raid your nearest public library and on the shelves marked "Africa" look up Nigeria, on which there are a score of books.

Send question direct to expert in charge—NOT to the magazine.

Snow, Water and Blind Sets

ONE of these lures will bring in the fur, if the fur is there and the decoy properly arranged:

Question.—"Will you give me all the information possible on the following subjects:

Fox-trapping—land, water and snow sets—good bait and scent recipes. Also, same with otter, mink, 'coon, fisher, marten and lynx.

With what sets for fox have you had the best luck?

Who among the other A. A. staff, aside from Raymond S. Spears, would be able to help, or add to what you could tell me?"—WALTER C. MUNSON, Colchester, Vt.

Answer, by Mr. St. John:—My favorite land or snow set is an old one and one perhaps that you are familiar with. Any small, clear spot in the vicinity of where a fox has been using will do.

On bare ground during a thaw or in the snow scatter bits of cooked meat, say in a radius of six feet of where you expect to make your set. If not too much trouble repeat this ground-baiting several times.

Finally make a bed of chaff or moss about two inches deep and plant the trap, with chain attached to clog, firmly on this bed, putting a little chaff or moss up under the pan of the trap. Cover trap with a piece of thin paper and then with more chaff.

A drop or two of fish-oil or other medicine near the trap helps—not so much to attract as to cover man scent. Remove any signs you have left and scatter more cooked or charred meat around as before, and your set is completed.

Water sets I use only near spring-holes where there is no danger of freezing. I simply make a platform large enough to hold a trap, in the water, for the fox to put his feet on in order to reach the bait, which is generally a dead rabbit or bird.

I have never trapped otter, but understand that they are generally taken by blind sets at the foot of slides. Most fur-bearers can be taken by ordinary cubby or barricade sets; building a small enclosure with just enough room for a trap at the entrance and the bait in the rear so that the animal must step over the trap to get to the bait. For all-around reliability you can't beat it.

Mr. Spears and Mr. John Thompson may be able to offer something.

Hawaiian Music

HERE are a few swift jolts for those who get their ideas about Hawaiians and Hawaii from the best-seats-fifty-cents vaudeville "palaces:"

Question:—"I read with much interest your article on Hawaii in Ask Adventure some months ago. I would like to visit the islands as soon as I can. I am fairly well posted in a general way.

What chance, if any, to work one's way out? What are the chances of landing a job in Honolulu?

My line is motion-picture operating. How many picture shows in Honolulu or elsewhere? Do you know the names of any? Would one stand a good show to get something else?

Tell what you can of Hawaiian music. Is it anything like they sell here?

Are there any natives in the out-of-the-way places in grass huts and pretty girls in "grass skirts?"

Are the girls as beautiful as they are cracked up to be?

What is the fare out? If there is any chance to ship out, would it do any good to write them?"—GLENN F. SMITH, Oxley, Ark.

Answer, by Mr. Halton:—I have your recent letter regarding chances for positions in the Hawaiian Islands. Regret very much that I can not offer you very much encouragement.

Under separate cover I am sending you booklets descriptive of the islands. You will note in the paragraph devoted to population, that the statistics show a preponderance of Asiatics, and will therefore readily understand that one's chances of employment with the Americans are very limited, as the Asiatics employ only Asiatics.

There are a number of motion-picture theaters in Honolulu, and in Hilo on the island of Hawaii and in Wailuku, on the island of Maui, but the operators are usually Japanese. There are three or four large theaters in Honolulu conducted by Americans, and there must be fifteen or twenty small places conducted by Orientals.

Regarding Hawaiian music, I am afraid that the popularity of Hawaiian music has caused a great flood of very inferior music throughout the United States As a matter of fact music in Honolulu is only a modern institution. The ukulele was invented by a Portuguese about thirty-five years ago. Prior to that there were practically no musical instruments.

There are places remote from civilization where Hawaiian natives live in grass huts, but under American rule the little red schoolhouse has permeated practically all sections of the island, where the children are taught the American language and ideas.

The only place you see Hawaiian girls in grass skirts is in the vaudeville show in the United States, though there are hula dancers in the islands who wear the grass skirts professionally. The native Hawaiian is a fine race of good-looking men and women, but they intermarried to such a great extent that there are approximately only 30,000 real full-blooded Hawaiians in the whole of the islands. You will find the girls there just as beautiful as they are in your own home town.

The minimum fare to Honolulu is $110 from San Francisco. It would be a waste of time to try to work your way out for the reason that if you ship as a sailor you are signed on for a round trip and will not be permitted to desert on arrival of the ship in Honolulu.

In short, Hawaiian Islands being a part of the United States, you will find it similar socially in all respects to any part of the United States.

Gold and Game in Newfoundland

GET acquainted with an island empire just ready and waiting for development:

Question:—"Please send me the most complete information you can on the natural resources and the opportunities for trapping and mining—that is, gold-mining—in the south and southeast of Newfoundland.

Has gold ever been discovered? If so, in what part of country?

What kinds of fur-bearing animals, and what are the laws on trapping?

Can you get an outfit, or would you have to take it in?]

Is there any duty on fur exported out of the country?"—A. M. Hilchie, Halifax City, N. S.

Answer, by Major Belford:—Gold has been discovered at Sop's Arm and Ming's Bight on the northeast coast, and in many other places. Very little prospecting has been done. The whole island is rich in minerals; practically every known mineral is found. There are rich copper-mines at Tilt Cove and other places. There is no doubt of the island's mineral wealth; it only needs development.

Newfoundland is the home of caribou. The herds are numerous, and some splendid heads are taken. The fur-bearers are black bear, lynx, beaver, otter and fox. The fur seal is also taken.

Write the Chief Game Warden, Saint John's, Newfoundland, for copy of the last game laws. An outfit can be secured on the island.

A 100-Foot Yawl for the High Seas

IT CAN go anywhere and can weather anything:

Question:—"Would a yawl, say eighty or one hundred feet long, be big enough to adventure around in over the ocean, carrying cargoes from one port to another and exploring the South Sea Islands? Is this feasible with a boat of this size?

What size crew would be necessary for efficient sailing?

Would a boat of this size ride the storms of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans?

What license would be necessary for carrying cargoes?

Would it be necessary to have master's license? If not, what license would be required?

What sails would be required for deep-sea sailing?

Have been to sea on Atlantic and Pacific oceans during 1917-18-19 and first three months of 1920, and would like to know if a correspondence course wouldn't help a person wishing to learn enough navigation to sail a ship of above size."—C. J. Sparks, Greasy Creek, Ky.

Answer, by Mr. Beriah Brown:—One of 100 feet length would be a good-sized lump of a schooner and should carry a crew of at least three men in a watch. No license is required for master or officers of sailing-craft under 700 tons register. A vessel of that size, properly built and rigged, could go around the world. Many smaller craft have done so. Smaller schooners have weathered the fiercest gales that blow.

A man of ordinary intelligence can learn the elements of navigation from any one of a dozen small treatises on the subject which have been published, or from a correspondence course. There are masters of sailing-craft in plenty whose knowledge of navigation is confined to dead reckoning, working a time sight and a meridian altitude.

World's Greatest Cattle-Ranches

THEY'RE in Argentina, and they produce the best cattle to be found anywhere:

Question:—"1. Are there any large cattle-ranches (or other kinds) in Argentine?

2. Owned by Americans?
3. What wages do they pay?
4. Is there hunting or trapping there?

I am twenty years old. My partner and myself intend to go somewhere more open than Wyoming is.

Please send me what other information you can about South America.

Please do not use my name in the magazine."— ——, Lovell, Wyo.

Answer, by Dr. Goldsmith:—1. Some of the largest cattle-ranches in the world are to be found in Argentina, where they are called *estancias.* The finest cattle produced anywhere are raised in Argentina. Prize bulls sell at from $30,000 to $60,000 apiece.

The greatest cattle-show on earth is that of the Sociedad Rural Argentina, held annually in Buenos Aires. When I say cattle, I mean beef cattle and sheep, although many horses and mules are produced.

2. Very few cattle-estates in Argentina are owned by "Americans," if by "Americans" you mean citizens of the United States or their descendants. The cattle-lands are mostly in the hands of Argentinos or Britishers.

3. Wages vary according to work and place. The ordinary rancher does not receive enough to attract a North American—from $35 to $50 a month; a foreman or *capataz* can make from $75 to $125, according to the size and wealth of the *estancia.* You could not very well serve as a *capataz* without a knowledge of the language.

4. You could find wild animals and birds to hunt and trap, provided you went far from the settled centers, into the northern provinces, into the Andine regions or into the far south of what we call Patagonia.

These two letters, which passed between Doctor Goldsmith and another correspondent, round out the information given above:

Question:—"Can you furnish me with all information regarding the prospects of getting work in the cattle-business in the Argentine or Uruguay or Brazil? Also the cost of land for a rancher, and the terms on which the government is holding land down there.

What kind of hunting-prospects are there down in that country?

I am an herdsman and have worked in the pure-bred cattle-business. I am anxious to go down to the Argentine, as I think there is more opening for young men down there.

Do you know of any way I can get work before going down there?

To settle an argument: Do the natives use bolo or lariat?"—N. F. Pegg, Chualor, Monterey Co., Calif.

Answer, by Dr. Goldsmith:—The governments of the three countries mentioned do not, as a rule, offer lands for cattle-ranches. They are interested in having people come in to devote themselves to agriculture and the development of lands. It is quite easy to secure good land, away from the settled centers, by application to the immigration authorities in Rio de Janeiro, Montevideo or Buenos Aires, the prices ranging from a few cents to two or three dollars an acre. Good opportunities are to be found in the territory of Misiones, in Argentina, where land can be taken up (125 acres) upon the payment of a sum equivalent to about $220 in five equal annual instalments.

In the remote regions of Argentina and Brazil there is plenty of game—large and small animals and birds—but the situation is not unlike that in the United States; game recedes from civilization.

My only suggestion is to secure a position through one of the companies on the inclosed list.

The Indians of Argentina and Chile formerly used the bolo. Such an object is now somewhat of a curiosity; the rope (*zoga*) is now generally used among the ranchmen.

The word "lariat" is a misnomer that crept into the United States by way of Texas, based upon a misunderstanding by the Texans of the two Spanish words *la riata,* which means either the rope or halter that one has on his own beast for the purpose of hitching, or the coupling-rope that serves to tie two horses or mules together for driving.

Our word "lasso," as a noun, is a corruption and misuse of the Spanish word *lazo,* which is a small rope or cord. Our word "lasso," used as a verb, is a corruption of the Spanish verb *iazar,* which means the throw and capture with a *zoga,* or, as we would say, a "lasso."

The *zoga* is used quite generally throughout Spanish and Portuguese America. The bolo, as I have said, was used by the Indians and the first colonists of Chile and Argentina to capture wild animals, especially the Argentina "ostrich" (*ñandú*) and horses.

Canoeing in Maine

IN PLANNING for your Summer vacation don't overlook the possibilities outlined below:

Question:—"I am writing for information as to outfit and equipment for a one-month camping, hunting and fishing trip by canoe and probable cost of trip for six persons; also locations and routes suitable for such a trip.

I am ignorant of regulations and customs governing these trips in the Maine country. Also necessity and cost of competent guide."—G. J. Meyers, North Kansas City, Missouri.

Answer, by Dr. Hathorne:—One of the best camping and canoe trips I could suggest for you would be the well-known Allagash trip. This trip covers about two hundred miles of some of the best waters in the State for fishing, with ideal camping-spots and plenty of big game.

This trip starts in at the head of Moosehead Lake, at N. E. Carry, and winds up at Fort Kent, on the Saint John's River. An outfit for this trip for a party of six would depend on the personnel of the party, and whether there were any of the gentler sex.

You would require at least three canoes and probably three guides. One guide can not take more than five in a party.

A guide furnishes one canoe, cooking-outfit and tent for his own use. All the remainder of the outfit is furnished by party.

In buying supplies for a trip of this kind the guide will aid you, but individual tastes have to be consulted. In the hunting-season, October to December first, you would need more and heavier clothing than in the fishing-season.

The expenses of the guide must be paid until he returns home. I should say a conservative estimate of a trip of this kind would be between $1,200 and $1,500, but if you have coin to spare and have never seen the country it's worth the money. If you are interested it would pay you to send to Geo. M. Houghton, Traffic Mgr. B. & A. R.R., Bangor, Me., for a copy of the book "In the Maine Woods." Enclose ten cents in stamps.

LOST TRAILS

Note—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

MRS. G. S. Born at Maternity Hospital, 3725 Cedar Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio, August 20, 1899. Parentage unknown. Father English; mother, a refined and educated blonde, and a native of some one of the Southern States, who was either taken or sent to the hospital by her people who are supposed to have been members of an aristocratic and wealthy Southern family. Child was adopted by Mrs. Mary E. Kelly, of Elyria, Ohio, now a resident of Lorain, Ohio. Mother requested that her child be called Margaret Fay. Child grown up and married, is well-educated and possesses a fine character. Any information concerning the identity of her parents or any other relatives and their whereabouts, will be appreciated.—Address DR. WM. E. ARNOLD, 812 West Broad St., Elyria, Ohio.

SMITH, HARLOD. Last heard from in Flint, Mich. Any information concerning him will be appreciated.—Address FRANK H. ROCKWELL, 291 Chenango, Binghamton, N. Y.

MASON, HENRY ARTHUR. Son. Last heard of having a farm in Chester, Conn., five years ago last August. Age thirty-eight, five feet, one inch tall, dark hair and eyes, weighs about 135 pounds. Married. Any information will be appreciated by his mother.—Address MRS. FRED MASON CURTIS, R. F. D. 91, North Reading, Mass.

HILLIARD, HOUGHTON. Last heard from seven years ago from Salt Lake, Utah. Write to your sister.—MRS. JULIA MACOMBER, 180 E. Main St., Amsterdam, New York.

CUMMINS, MOZART. Born in Hendersonville, Ky. Known around Johnson City and Herrin, Ill. About five feet, ten inches tall; weighs 140 pounds, dark curly hair, slim build. Write your old pal.—Address M. E. SIGMUND, 225 North 11th St., West, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

BOTTING, LEONARD. Of Walmer, Kent, England. His old classmate, who is on a short visit to New York, would be very glad to hear of him before returning to England. Last heard of in New York, end of 1891.—Address GEORGE T. BAND, 269 West 72nd St., New York, N. Y.

BUCK, SADIE. Also known as Peg Johnson. Wife. Married by City Clerk, New York City, September, 1919. Your husband, former Sergeant of army recruiting, who was taken to army hospital on Staten Island from Argonne Hotel wants to hear from you. Please write me at once.—Address CHAS. H. McC., care of *Adventure.*

POLLITT, PERCY. Canvasser and rover. Home in Chicago. Has aunt in New York State. Would like present address or information before and after his stay at South Bend.—Address F. X. SMITH, Box 185, Station 69, Boston, Mass.

GILBERTO, RUACHO. Last heard of in Detroit, Michigan. Left El Paso in 1917. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write.—Address JOAGUIN-VELARDE, 409 East Blvd., El Paso, Texas.

HANK. I. J. B. F. Letter sent to your last address returned. That trip didn't pan out. Write to me at home.—ONE CORD.

O. K. Please communicate with me, care of business address. Have been trying to reach you since I last saw you.—LOUISE K. H.

HUPP, CHARLES E. Twenty-five years old. Five feet, eleven inches tall; red hair. Served as private and corporal in Co. I, 27th U. S. Infantry from 1915 in Philippines and in A. E. F. in Siberia. Discharged from army August 26, 1920, at Fort McDowell, Cal. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address W. S. HUPP, Momence, Ill., Box 557.

MONTGOMERY, A. J. H. "Tofield Terror." Last heard of at Insinger, Saskatchewan, Canada. Was overseas in the 8th Batt. C. R. T. Write to your old pal.—Address THOMAS O. JONES, 82 North Main St., Perry, N. Y.

REYNOLDS, JOHN. Twenty years old, gray-blond hair, and about six feet tall. Last heard from in Galveston, Texas. His middle name being Sanderson, may go by name of John Sanderson. Any information will be appreciated by his sister.—Address HAZEL REYNOLDS, 562 Jersey Ave., Jersey City, N. J.

THROPE, FRANK. Last heard of when leaving Grand Gorge, N. Y., July 6, 1919, for Binghamton, N. Y. Would like to hear from him or any one knowing his whereabouts.—Address JACK NOLE, care of Mrs. J. M. Scott, 1023 North Caroline St., Baltimore, Md.

HARRY, G. Can I help? Send address. Do you remember our afternoon at Great Lakes? Please write. —GEORGE, care of *Adventure.*

TIDBLAD, CARL ERHARD. Age fifty-four, height five feet, nine inches. Machinist somewhere in middle-West. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write.—Address E. A. ANDREW, 15 Everett St., Jamaica Plain, Mass.

DAVIS, FRANK. About forty years old, six feet tall, dark hair, gray eyes, thumb and finger missing on left hand. Last seen in Anaconda, Mont., 1909. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated by his mother.—MRS. W. C. BAKER, 211 Woody St., Missoula, Mont.

TOULSNESS, OLE. Left Butte City, Mont., in 1900. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write.—Address HARRISON & SON, Box 912, Jamestown, N. D.

JENNESS, DALE. Six feet, one-half inch tall, weighs about 150 pounds, slim and light-brown hair. Last seen in Sterling, Ill., 1916. Left for Brawly, Cal. Walking on crutches at that time. Any information will be appreciated.—Address A. B. TREGO, 407 Broadway, Sterling, Ill.

SWENSON, NEIL. About six feet tall, blond hair, blue eyes, clear complexion. Last heard from in the Texas oil-fields. Come across Neil, your mother and I are anxious to hear from you.—Address W. A. PAGE, 26 Post Ave., New York, N. Y.

SHAFFER, EDW. W. Age about twenty-nine, five feet seven inches, 170 pounds, black curly hair. Expert railroad telegrapher. Last heard from in 1916, in government hospital near Brownsville, Texas. Parents supposed to be in Loveland, Colo. Any information will be appreciated.—Address B. R. E., care of *Adventure.*

MOTHES, PAUL M. Weight about 150 pounds, about fifty years of age; dark hair and brown eyes. Left home in Jersey about eight years ago. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address Daughter.—ANNA B. MOTHES, 49 Gloucester St., Toronto, Ont., Canada.

SCOTT, HENRY E. Your anxious mother wants to hear from you. Please write and tell where you are.—MOTHER.

DARLINGTON, MICHAEL P.—Mickey. Please write to the friend who you met at Camp Kearny, Cal.—Address LOYS F. BOWER, care of Mrs. Edith Bower, Box 21, Covert, Mich.

BARNETT, MRS. JAMES. Maiden name Annie Jackson. Age about thirty-five, five feet, four inches tall, brown hair and blue eyes, weighs about 118 pounds. Husband has red hair, red complexion, tall and was section-foreman at Williams, Arizona. Both when last heard from were taking a train in January, 1919, at Williams, Arizona for an unknown destination. Any information will be appreciated by her sister.—Address MRS. A. C. CRUMP, 215 E. Ormsby Ave., Louisville, Ky.

UNDERWOOD, RAY. Will you please write and let me know where I can communicate with you? Am so lonesome. Are you?—Address EFFIE UNDERWOOD, Inskeept Mfg. Co., Western Ave., Springfield, Ohio.

THE following have been inquired for in either the Mid-April or First May issues of Adventure. They can get the names of the inquirer from this magazine:

ALLEN, CHARLES K.; Barrow, Otis, W.; Barrow, James S.; Bowman, Daniel; Burns, Jim; Bushnell, Lowman Chester; Clarke, Jim; Decker, Chas.; Donley, George D.; Eckert, Warren; Fenney, Frank, Catherine, Mary, Ellen, Margaret, Thomas and William; Fredet, Peter; Hitter, Phil; Hodges, George Otis; Hoffman, Wm.; Horton, Fred; Hugh, Edward; Jones, Merlin; Kelly, Joe; Linc; Lindgren, Mathias; McDonald, Duncan; McKee, A. L.; Murrell, Butler E.; Nirgel, Cooper; Pendland, A. C.; Pierce; Pinians, Robert O.; Reed, Forrest B.; Rethwisch, Pvt. Herman K.; Rice, Herbert G.; Robinson, Dan; Schlegel, Phil; Schulky, Fred; Shultz, Mrs. Julia A.; Soderberg, Sergeant Bob; Speilman, Al.; Tag, Howard, J. H.; Teets, Earl J.; Turberville, Clem; Whitey, Adolph; Wilkinson, Charles; Williams, "Kid."

MISCELLANEOUS—(Baldy) Jack Tettle, Frank Burns, Dave Searbourgh, Burns Harney and Dick Horton, or any of the boys of Pack Train 308-9-10 or M. T. C. Fellows in Mexico, with Troop D. 13th Cav. 1916-17. Members of Co. B. 52nd Inf. Co. L. 321st. Inf. 81st Div. "Wild Cat" "Stonewall" Co. G. and 7th Co. 1st Prov. D. Bn. 156th D. B. Members of U. S. *Monitor*, *Tallahasse* or other U. S. vessel that called at Bermuda 1915-1919.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

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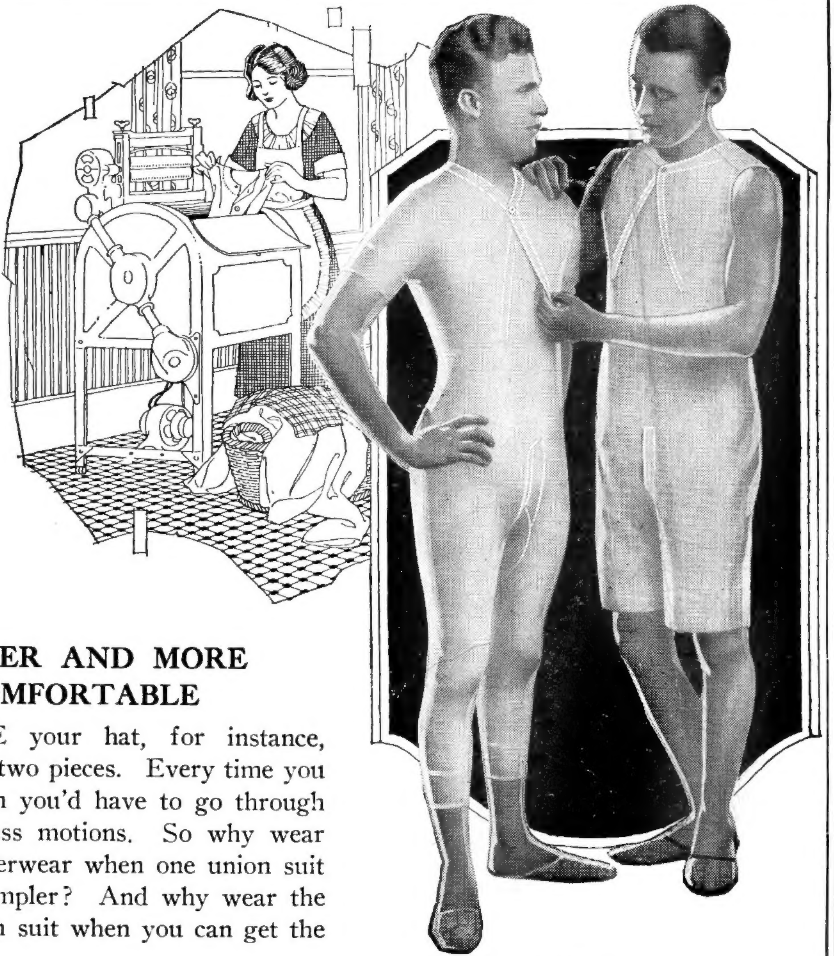

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